

# Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 26

World Level

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

## Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller... than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

# Chapter 1: The Owner of the Eternal Blood

The instant that Ji Ning stepped through the towering gates and into the endless dark of the Castrum Divinitus, space began to twist around him. A moment later, the world brightened up as he found himself within a hallway.

This hallway had rather uneven walls that had torches stuck into them. The torches were blazing merrily, filling the hallway with their light.

“Eh?” Ning stood there in the hallway and scanned the area. No one else was in sight.

“What’s going on? Why have I been separated from Youji and the others?” Ning mused to himself.

Suddenly, a faint wave of energy rippled out from up ahead. Ning hurriedly turned to look, only to see strands of fire fly out from the two torches and coalesce in the air, transforming into the form of a barefoot, gauze-clad maiden. The maiden had long, beautiful green hair. Although her body was covered by a layer of thin gauze, she was essentially nude for all intents and purposes.

“I am the formation-spirit of the Castrum Divinitus. This is one of my incarnations,” the maiden said.

Ning was puzzled. “Why have I been separated from the others?”

“Everyone who took part in the Samsara Grinders and survived shall be blessed with good fortune. However, since you each walk different paths you shall each be given unique bits of karmic fortune. Thus, every single person has been teleported to a different part of the Castrum Divinitus,” the maiden said. “Come with me.”

Ning followed behind her obediently.

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Indeed, every single person had been teleported to a different region.

The blood-robed youth, Arroyo, had also appeared in an empty hallway.

He scanned the hallway with his bloodsea eyes, a hint of impatience visible within them. Suddenly, a barefoot, gauze-covered maiden suddenly appeared before his very eyes as well.

“I am the formation-spirit of the Castrum Divinitus. This is one of my incarnations. Follow me,” the maiden said.

“Where is the divine blood of the Eternal?” Arroyo asked.

“The divine blood of the Eternal?” The maiden looked at him, a strange smile playing on her beautiful face.

“Yes, the Eternal blood. My performance atop the Samsara Grinders should’ve been the best of the five. The Goldeye Golem himself said that our group’s performance was good enough to warrant the Eternal blood being awarded, but that I would have to enter the Castrum Divinitus to acquire it.” Arroyo gazed at the maiden, a look of urgency in his eyes. “I don’t give a damn about any other ‘blessings’. I just want the Eternal blood right away.”

The maiden looked at him, then slowly shook her head. “There is none.”

“None?” Arroyo was stunned.

“None for you, that is.” The maiden looked at him calmly.

“What are you saying?” Arroyo began to grow upset.

“It is simple. The divine blood of the Eternal shall be given to a different cultivator, not you.” The maiden smiled. “But of course, you’ll still be blessed with some good karmic fortune.”

“Impossible!” Arroyo’s eyes instantly turned red with fury. He howled angrily, “I was the most powerful one! Which of the four surviving World-level cultivators can possibly compare to me? That new Chaos Immortal, Su Youji? World God Dragonbinder of the Badlands Court? My servant? Fukai? None of them are qualified! Daolord Allgod was an ancient power and an incredibly proud man. There’s no way he would be so unfair!”

“All of the trials which Master set down were quite fair,” the maiden said. “And the results of the trial were... that you did not qualify to acquire

the Eternal blood.”

“SHIT!!!” Arroyo was both enraged and panicked.

How could he not be enraged? How could he not panic? His very life was riding on him gaining the Eternal blood! Both he and Fukai had paid enormous prices just to make it from the Fog Sea to the gates of the Castrum Divinitus. Both had experienced countless dangers, but they had been willing to risk their lives multiple times because they needed the Eternal blood.

If they acquired the Eternal blood, their status would instantly skyrocket!

If they did not... they would die!

No one would be able to save him. Not even his father would be able to save him.

But it made no sense. After he made his breakthrough atop the Samsara Grinders, he was definitely the most powerful of the five surviving World Gods. He had felt certain that the Eternal blood would fall into his hands... and yet, reality had proven otherwise. How could he not be angry? How could he not panic?

“How could this have happened? Who was it? World God Dragonbinder? No way, he was only able to win because of his Dao-seal. Fukai? He won in a pathetic fashion, and he is much weaker than me. My own servant? His performance was completely unremarkable.”

Arroyo continued to ponder the matter. “Perhaps the Flamefairy, Su Youji? Mm... possible. She is a brand new Chaos Immortal, but she was able to kill Darkfall! It could be said she punched well above her weight...”

“Was it Su Youji?” Arroyo looked at the maiden before him.

“That’s a secret,” the maiden said. “No need for you to ask.”

“Wait, wait... something’s off. Daolord Allgod was an incredibly proud figure, while Su Youji is extremely weak. The only reason she even survived was because of that freakishly strong Elder God! How could Daolord Allgod possibly have been willing to give her the Eternal blood?

Hell, he'd probably give it to that freak of an Elder God before he'd give it to her."

Suddenly, Arroyo's face turned white.

"That freak of an Elder God."

Arroyo suddenly remembered the words that the three-eyed man had said just before the trial of the Samsara Grinders.

"As for the surviving cultivators, they will each be blessed with a small bit of fortune. The cultivator whose performance was the best will have a chance of acquiring the divine blood of the Eternal."

"The cultivator whose performance was the best... right. The word was 'cultivator'. World Gods and Chaos Immortals are cultivators, but so too are Elder Gods." When Arroyo carefully thought back to what had been said and what had happened, he realized that it all fit perfectly. It was entirely possible that the freakishly strong Elder God had been the one to win the Eternal blood.

In terms of 'best performance'? For an Elder God to end up killing a master-class World God, albeit through the usage of a small trick, was an utterly inconceivable feat. Arroyo himself had merely slain a supreme World God while originally being a supreme World God himself.

"Right. If we factor in that Elder God..."

"That freak of an Elder God does indeed stand a better chance to earn the Eternal blood than me." Arroyo turned to stare at the maiden before him, then growled, "It was that freak of an Elder God, right?"

"I told you, it is a secret." The maiden remained as calm as ever. "Enough. Stop wasting time. Since you survived, you'll be blessed with good fortune. Follow me."

"No need. I don't want it." A cold light was flickering in Arroyo's eyes.

"You don't want it?" The maiden frowned.

"Right. I want to leave the Castrum Divinitus immediately," Arroyo said.

"I hope you don't regret it," the maiden said. "Others would beg for the

chance to be blessed with such good fortune. I recommend that you at least take a look at it. You can always leave after doing so.”

“I don’t need it,” Arroyo said calmly. If every single survivor was going to be blessed with a bit of karmic luck, how good could it possibly be? In addition, as far as he was concerned, no blessing mattered at all if he didn’t find the Eternal blood. He would still end up dying!

“If that’s the case, I’ll let you leave.” The maiden nodded.

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The gold-robed Fukai stared at the maiden before him, an ugly look on his face. “I knew it. The Eternal blood was awarded to someone else! It must’ve fallen into Arroyo’s hands. No... I still have a chance! If I can kill Arroyo, I can seize the Eternal blood!”

“So what if he’s more powerful than me now that he’s made a breakthrough? I was completely unable to use most of my treasures during the trial of the Samsara Grinders. If I use all of them, I can dominate anyone below the Samsara Daolord level.” A berserk look was in the gold-robed youth’s eyes. “Once I kill Arroyo, the Eternal blood will be mine.”

“Follow me,” the maiden instructed.

“I don’t need any ‘blessings’. I want to leave the Castrum Divinitus immediately,” the gold-robed Fukai said.

“You want to leave immediately?” The maiden was surprised.

“Right.” The gold-robed youth nodded.

“No regrets?” The maiden asked.

“No regrets.” Madness could be seen flickering in Fukai’s eyes. He had been pushed to a precipice! He felt certain that the Eternal blood was now in Arroyo’s hands. If he wasn’t able to seize it, he would definitely die. His only chance of staying alive was to kill Arroyo before the man was able to leave this chaosworld!

If he wasn’t able to do so and if Arroyo was able to escape this

chaosworld, there would be no chance to stop him whatsoever.

“How odd. One person after another has refused the blessing of good fortune, instead choosing to leave the Castrum Divinitus right away,” the maiden mused to herself.

“One person after another?” Fukai was stunned upon hearing this. “Who left? Was it Arroyo?”

The maiden glanced at him. “This is a secret.”

“It has to be Arroyo. I want to leave right away! Immediately! As fast as possible!” Fukai was panicking.

“As you wish.” The maiden nodded.

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Ning was calmly but curiously following behind the maiden leading the way before him. Her bare feet gently glided over the floor as she advanced, soon leading him to an enormous stone archway.

“Go in.” The maiden went past the stone arch.

Ning followed inside. Upon doing so, light flashed in front of him. This was an enormous hall that was filled with many statues. There had to be thousands of these enormous stone statues here! Ning swept the hall with his gaze. It had to be at least ten kilometers high and a hundred kilometers in diameter.

“What’s that?” Ning saw that a long narrow table was located in a corner of the massive hall. Atop this table was a crystalline globe that glowed with white light.

## Chapter 2: The Aeonian Kingdom

The maiden's lips curved upwards slightly as she turned to gaze in that direction in an intrigued manner.

Whoosh.

A figure suddenly appeared out of nowhere. It was the bald three-eyed man who was the First Guardian and Commander of the Castrum Divinitus – the Goldeye Golem.

“Eh?” Ning was slightly surprised when he saw the Goldeye Golem appear.

“Ji Ning, congratulations on having won the divine blood of the Eternal,” the Goldeye Golem said.

“You know my name?” Ning was rather surprised. During his conversations with World God Dragonbinder and the others atop the plaza in front of the Castrum Divinitus, Ning had never revealed his name. Any mention of his name would've occurred during their mental conversations, resulting in the likes of Fukai and Arroyo still having no idea as to exactly who Ning was.

“Nothing that occurs within the Allgod Estate can escape my eyes,” the nearby maiden said. “I heard about you from ‘Myriad Mountains’ quite some time ago. Enough. Go ahead and take a look. The Eternal blood is within that crystal globe.”

“Why is it going to me?” Ning was puzzled.

Although he was rather pleased, he was also quite calm. For most cultivators, what mattered the most was their insights into the Dao. This was what allowed them to reach higher levels of cultivation. As for treasures, they were of secondary importance! There was a limit to useful an outside source of help would be. Ning was already comparable to a master-class World God, but no amount of treasures would allow him to be comparable to a Samsara Daolord.

A Samsara Daolord who was skilled in illusions could instantly plunge



Ning into an illusory world with a single glance. Ning wouldn't be able to resist it, and he wouldn't even have a chance to use any of his treasures. This was what happened when one was at a much lower level of cultivation!

"As I said," the Goldeye Golem said, "After the trial of the Samsara Grinders comes to an end, the cultivator whose performance was the best will have a chance of acquiring the divine blood of the Eternal. You were the cultivator whose performance was the best."

"Cultivator?" Ning blinked, then quickly understood.

"Ahaha, right! Cultivator! World-level cultivators are cultivators, but so too are Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals." The Goldeye Golem roared with laughter. "Those two kids, Arroyo and Fukai? Hmph! How could I possibly let the Eternal blood go to them?"

"Eh?" Ning was puzzled. What was this all about.

"If it wasn't for you, then based on the rules which Master set down all those years ago, I truly would've been forced to hand the Eternal blood over to Arroyo. But since you came, me giving the blood to you instead is still in keeping with Master's rules." The Goldeye Golem pointed towards the table. "Go open it up."

"Alright." Ning nodded, then walked over towards the table. He was quite curious as well. Both Arroyo and Fukai had an extremely large number of treasures, but they were desperate and willing to pay any price to acquire this Eternal blood. What sort of treasure was it, exactly?

The formation-spirit of the Castrum Divinitus and the Goldeye Golem exchanged glances as they watched Ning move towards the table. Both of them were smiling.

"Eternal blood." Ning walked to the table, staring at the crystal ball that was glowing with hazy light. After carefully inspecting it, he was able to tell that it was actually composed of two separate parts, an upper part and a lower part. Ning reached out to grab the crystal ball, then applied a bit of pressure to it. Whoosh! The two parts began to swivel in opposite directions. After Ning gave it a slight tug, the two parts completely

separated.

In that instant...

BOOM!!!!!!

An utterly terrifying aura that was far beyond anything Ning could've imagined instantly blasted forth into his mind, striking against his soul and his truesoul.

Thud! Thud!

Ning's face was completely ashen as he took two heavy, stumbling steps backwards. His mind was completely blank, and the two halves of the crystal ball fell out of his hands and onto the ground with a crashing sound. However, the fist-sized globe of blood-streaked golden liquid that had been slowly flowing inside of the crystal ball continued to hover in midair. As it slowly spun and swiveled, it released an aura of utterly incomprehensible power.

Only after a long period of time passed did Ning manage to regain his faculties and recover from the sudden shock of that terrifying aura.

As soon as Ning regained his senses, he couldn't help but furiously retreat several kilometers before he was able to feel slightly less nauseous.

"Is that the divine blood of the Eternal?" Ning stared at the fist-sized globule of blood that was hovering in the air. He had never imagined that a single drop of blood essence could brim with such incredible power. He had encountered other Eternal weapons and had attuned himself to the exalted sword-aura that was located within Violetjewel's quintessence core, but this was the first time that he was completely shaking with terror.

It was his very soul that was shaking. He was utterly horrified! The aura from the blood alone had instantly caused his mind to go completely blank, rendering him completely incapable of thought.

"Right. This is the divine blood of the Eternal, the Eternal blood of Emperor Melobo," the Goldeye Golem said. "Years ago, Master was able to heavily wound Emperor Melobo, hacking off a large amount of his flesh.

Master took that large amount of flesh and blood, then distilled it into this single drop of Eternal blood. This essentially represents half of the entire life force vitality of Emperor Melobo.”

“Oh.” Ning nodded slowly.

“Remember. After you bring the Eternal blood out of this place, you absolutely must not open the globe.” The Goldeye Golem waved his hand, causing the two fallen halves of the crystal globe to fly into his hand. He resealed the globule of Eternal blood into the crystal ball, then locked it tightly. That terrifying aura instantly vanished. He then tossed that crystal globe, sending it flying towards Ning like a streak of light.

Ning caught it. Puzzled, he asked, “I cannot open it?”

“The members of the Aeonian Kingdom are able to sense this Eternal blood, but so long as you remain here in the Castrum Divinitus they will not dare to come and take it.” The Goldeye Golem explained, “But if you were to open the crystal globe while outside the Allgod Estate, the terrifying experts of the Aeonians will immediately pursue you upon sensing it.”

Ning was stunned. He hurriedly asked, “What is this ‘Aeonian Kingdom’?”

“Something which you weren’t meant to know about. Generally speaking, it is rare for even World-level experts to have any interactions with them. Still, once you break through to become a World God you will be an extraordinary figure. You probably should get a better sense of them now,” the Goldeye Golem said.

“Let me explain to him,” the maiden suddenly interjected.

“Fine, you explain.” The Goldeye Golem had a hint of a smile on his face.

The maiden looked at Ning. “The Endless Territories are filled with countless cultivators. Do you know what the most powerful organization in the Endless Territories is?”

“The Dao Alliance!” Ning said, then chuckled. “Senior ‘Myriad Mountains’ mentioned them to me.”

“Right. The Dao Alliance, an alliance that comprises virtually all of the cultivators of the Endless Territories.” The maiden nodded. “Cultivators are by nature unrestrained figures that like to do as they please. Why, then would they join together to form an alliance? It is precisely because there exist certain creatures which are born enemies to all cultivators.”

“Born enemies?” Ning was puzzled.

“Right.” The maiden nodded.

“As you probably know, the endless primordial chaos is filled with countless mysteries and has given birth to many unique races,” the maiden said. “Ordinary cultivators who originally started off as mortals were generally born on a chaosworld and slowly grew up there. Even natural-born Fiendgods are born from the Worldheart of a chaosworld.”

“However, there are some special types of lifeforms that are different. They were brought into being within the primordial chaos due to certain special, unique circumstances, and they have certain special abilities.”

“Then again... most of those creatures are fairly rare. In fact, some races might have just one or two representatives in all the Endless Territories. There is no way they can compete against the Dao Alliance.”

“However, there is one organization that can. We don’t know where they came from, and although they are fairly rare they number in the hundreds. Every single member of this race possesses at least the power of a Samsara Daolord,” the maiden said. “They set up the ‘Aeonian Kingdom’ and call themselves the ‘Aeonians’. Much like us, they need to engage in cultivation, but there is a major difference! If they can kill and devour other Samsara Daolords, they can grow much more powerful.”

“Devour other Samsara Daolords?” Ning was shocked.

“Right!” The maiden nodded. “Devour them, just like cultivators might devour food or fine wine. To them, Samsara Daolords are delicacies to be feasted on!”

The maiden continued, “The countless cultivators of the Aeonian Kingdom wish to grow more powerful and walk farther on their paths. The

Aeonians, however, seek to devour us. Thus, we are born enemies.” The maiden’s gaze turned cold. “My master’s Dao-companion was devoured by Emperor Melobo, which was why Master went so berserk in his efforts to slay him.”

Ning’s heart shivered.

How could such creatures even exist? Creatures that could actually devour Samsara Daolords?

“As a race, the Aeonians are fairly few in number. It takes a long time for a new Eternal to be born, but they’ve been in existence for an even longer period of time. Multiple Eternal Emperors stand guard over their Aeonian Kingdom, making it so that even the Dao Alliance is unable to break into it.” The maiden laughed. “In all honesty, they don’t really matter that much. The Aeonian Kingdom is actually much weaker than the Dao Alliance, as the Dao Alliance is an alliance of all the cultivators of the Endless Territories. It has countless experts within it! The Aeonian Kingdom’s advantage lies in the fact that its members are extremely unified, with all of their experts living together in the same place. Their Aeonian Kingdom is also protected by an utterly inconceivable treasure. If it wasn’t for that treasure, they would’ve been wiped out by the Dao Alliance a long time ago.”

Ning nodded.

“The endless primordial chaos has given birth to many different races of creatures. This race, the Aeonians, rely on devouring our Samsara Daolords to grow more powerful. As a result, they are one of our most hated enemies. In truth, there are actually many types of lifeforms that are both more powerful and more numerous than the Aeonians. There are also types of lifeforms that both rarer and more individually powerful as well. They have existed for countless years and possess simply inconceivable amounts of power,” the maiden said. “However... the most powerful organization shall forever remain the Dao Alliance! The Dao Alliance has far more cultivators and its ranks are all but endless.”

Ning chuckled. It was true. The Badlands Territory was a perfect

example. It was filled to the brim with cultivators; when did Ning ever see other types of lifeforms within it?

# Chapter 3: Unschooled in the Dao of the Sword

Ji Ning looked at the crystal globe in his hands, then asked, “So... what can I do with this Eternal blood?”

“This drop of Eternal blood isn’t that valuable to the Dao Alliance. At most, they would use it to refine certain pills or rear certain unique bugbeasts,” the maiden said. “However, it is incredibly, incredibly important to the Aeonians. This drop of Eternal blood is enough to allow any member of their race to skyrocket in power! It represents nearly half the vital essence of Emperor Melobo, after all. Almost half of his blood and flesh was used in the refining of this drop of divine blood.”

“Any member of the Aeonians who knows that you are in possession of this blood will try to hunt you down and kill you,” the maiden said.

Ning frowned. So it wasn’t of use to him, but the Aeonian Kingdom would do anything to get it?

“Still, don’t worry. The Badlands Territory is one of the fairly central regions of the Dao Alliance. The Aeonians would never dare to encroach upon this territory! At most, they would send some of their World-level pawns.” The maiden continued, “To tell you the truth, both of us suspect that Fukai and Arroyo are most likely pawns of the Aeonians.”

“Right. They want the Eternal blood too much, far too much. It doesn’t make sense.” The Goldeye Golem agreed. “The Allgod Estate has many rare treasures within it, but the only thing they care about is the Eternal blood. In addition, both of them led squads of ten World-level servants, have many treasures, and have Eternal weapons.”

The Goldeye Golem shook his head. “They have so many treasures and such an extraordinary background, yet they are completely fixated on the Eternal blood and are willing to sacrifice anything to get it. This is more than enough to make us suspect that they are the running dogs of the Aeonians.”

Ning nodded. Right. They had to be lackeys at the most, as true members of the Aeonians were incredibly rare and were all at least at the Samsara Daolord level.

“But of course, I have nothing more than my suspicions,” the Goldeye Golem said. “In the end, they followed all of Master’s rules as they made it through many dangerous regions to come to the gates of the Castrum Divinitus, then survived the trial of the Samsara Grinders. If it wasn’t for you, I would’ve been forced to give this drop of Eternal blood to Arroyo.”

“Right.” Ning nodded.

“This drop of Eternal blood won’t be of much use to you. Once you leave this place, hurry over to the Badlands Court,” the Goldeye Golem said. “Tell Daolord Badlands that you acquired a drop of Eternal blood and that you wish to sell it to the Dao Alliance.”

The nearby maiden nodded in agreement. “Daolord Badlands is extraordinarily powerful. Although he has yet to reach the Verge of the Daomerge, he is an impressively powerful Daolord of the Endless Territories. In Numerancy, at least, he can rank as one of the top three Daolords in all the Endless Territories. If he can advance by just one more step and reach the Verge, he’ll most likely be every bit as strong as Master once was.”

“As strong as Daolord Allgod was?” Ning was secretly shocked.

Daolord Badlands truly was an incredible figure. If he reached the Verge, he would be comparable to Daolord Allgod? No wonder even Daolord Solesky was so courteous to him.

“You needn’t worry that a power such as Daolord Badlands would lust after your drop of Eternal blood.” The maiden laughed. “Handing it over to him is the safest solution. If you mention it to the other Samsara Daolords of the Dao Alliance, nine out of ten would choose to simply kill you and seize it for themselves. Although this drop of Eternal blood isn’t that valuable to the Dao Alliance, they’d still be willing to pay a price of roughly two million cubes of chaos nectar to purchase it.”

“Two MILLION cubes?” Ning was rather stunned. This was like manna



falling from the heavens!

Still, wealth and treasures didn't matter that much. In the end, they were all outside sources of strength. Personal strength was what mattered the most!

"The Aeonian Kingdom would probably be willing to pay ten million cubes." The maiden chuckled. "But there is no way the Dao Alliance would ever sell it to them. It would only result in an Aeonian expert becoming even more powerful and dangerous."

"Two million? Ten million?" This was a simply staggering amount of wealth for Ning. Suddenly, Ning remembered his big brother Daolord Solesky telling him that he had given Daolord Badlands enough treasures to create two perfect avatars. This was all for the sake of convincing Daolord Badlands to assist him.

Ning immediately asked, "How much wealth would be needed in order for a Samsara Daolord to create a perfect avatar?"

"A perfect one?" The maiden grinned as she looked at Ning. "Most Samsara Daolords generally create simple and rather crude avatars. With each step they take, they tread the line between life and death, after all. Only after reaching an inconceivable level of power would they dare to go and create an avatar which could be described as 'perfect'. Thus, you would probably need at least ten million cubes worth of treasure in order to create a perfect avatar! Even for Samsara Daolords who are at the Verge, this is a sum that represents all the wealth and treasures they possess."

Finally, Ning understood. His big brother Daolord Solesky must have sold off nearly all of his possessions in order to acquire enough wealth to convince Daolord Badlands to help him. Daolord Solesky was a Palace Lord of Vastheaven Palace and had lived for countless years. This time, for the sake of his Daomerge, he had been willing to bring out almost everything he had.

"Ten million cubes is normally a sum which only Samsara Daolords at the Verge can produce," the maiden said. "Normal, weaker Samsara

Daolords generally have a networth of just a few hundred thousand cubes of chaos nectar. In other words, this drop of Eternal blood is worth as much as all the combined treasures of multiple 'ordinary' Daolords."

The Goldeye Golem said solemnly, "The endless primordial chaos is filled with countless hidden treasures. A single mysterious leaf might be worth millions of cubes of chaos nectar. For example, a single drop of Mirrorheart Water is worth enough to drive mad even a Samsara Daolord who is at the Verge. They'd be willing to spend ten million cubes of chaos nectar to buy such a treasure, but they wouldn't find anyone willing to sell to them. However, all these things are illusory. Treasures are nothing more than outside sources of strength. In the end, success in cultivation requires you to rely on yourself."

Ning nodded.

When Daolord Solesky had gone to the Waveshift World, he had been searching for a special treasure. For the sake of finding that treasure, Daolord Solesky had first risked his life in the Windsorce Ruins to acquire that 'Talisman of Eternity', then paid an utterly enormous price to convince Daolord Badlands to help him out. They had then delved deep into the Waveshift World. From this, one could see that there were indeed some treasures that would drive even the most powerful of Daolords mad with desire.

"True. In the end, all treasures are nothing more than outside sources of help." The maiden sighed. "For the sake of his Daomerge, my master risked his life to find certain useful treasures and also invited many of his friends to help him out. He did everything he possibly could to prepare for his Daomerge, but in the end he still failed. However, there are legends of ancient powers who made no preparations at all. They naturally completed their Daomerge while sleeping and dreaming, winning eternity for themselves."

"In the end, cultivation is what matters the most." The maiden sighed.

Ning nodded. He had come to understand this point long ago. Honestly, everyone did, including Daolord Allgod and Daolord Solesky. However,

they had reached the end of their cultivation path and were unable to advance any further. They had reached the Verge of the Daomerge but weren't confident in succeeding in it. It was only natural that they would go try and find treasures that might help them out and increase their odds of succeeding in their Daomerge.

"You now know how you should dispose of this drop of Eternal blood." The maiden pointed at the statues surrounding them. The great hall was a hundred kilometers in diameter, and its four walls were filled with thousands of statues. "Master personally carved all of these statues."

"Alchemy, artificing, formations... Master was skilled in many, many things. This is why he titled himself 'Allgod'," the maiden said. "Master even tried to train in the Dao of the Sword. For the sake of his cultivation, Master inspected the skills and sword-arts of more than five thousand World-level experts who walked the path of the Dao of the Sword. All of these World-level experts had completely different sword-arts."

The maiden continued, "After Master viewed their sword-arts, he carved these five thousand-plus statues."

"Every single statue is different and represents a different World-level cultivator's sword-arts," the maiden said. "After visualizing and mastering all of these different sword-arts and spending all this effort in carving these statues, Master's skill in the Dao of the Sword had reached the level of a new Samsara Daolord who specialized in sword-arts."

Ning was speechless upon hearing this. This sort of cultivation method was simply...

Viewing the sword-arts of more than five thousand World-level experts who trained in the Dao of the Sword? The entire Badlands Territory probably didn't hold so many experts of the sword!

After finishing his carvings, he had reached the level of a new Samsara Daolord who had ascended through the Dao of the Sword?

"Afterwards, Master gave it up. As he put it, he simply didn't have any talent for the Dao of the Sword," the maiden said. "Master actually spent a total of multiple chaos cycles in order to first master the sword-arts of all

of those World-level experts, then carve these thousands of statues.”

Ning had indeed heard from the formation-spirit of the Ten Thousand Mountains that Daolord Allgod “wasn’t that skilled in the Dao of the Sword.” However, that was only in comparison to his other Daos. Daolord Allgod had been so incredibly skilled in other areas that he before dying, he had been able to set up a formation that frightened even Eternal Emperors. The golem he had made, the Goldeye Golem, was comparable to major powers who had reached the Verge of the Daomerge.

As for the Dao of the Sword? He was merely comparable to new Samsara Daolords who specialized in this Dao. By comparison, he truly “wasn’t that skilled in the Dao of the Sword.”

“Spend some time meditating on these statues. These five thousand-plus statues represent more than five thousand different types of sword-arts. Master often said that all Daos are linked. As a result, from these many sword-arts he ended up discovering a path that would allow someone to break through to become a Samsara Daolord,” the maiden said.

“Right.” Ning nodded, then walked over to stare at the statues. Suddenly, he turned his head and asked, “How much time do I have?”

“As much time as you want!” The maiden laughed. “You can spend one or two chaos cycles here if you wish. I trust that Fukai and Arroyo won’t wait outside the Allgod Estate for such a long period of time.”

“They are waiting outside?” Ning was slightly startled. He had already anticipated this possibility, but for it to actually occur still made him feel uneasy.

“Yes. The two of them did not wish to be given any blessings or treasures. Both of them chose to leave the Allgod Estate right away. If my prediction is correct, both are definitely waiting for you outside,” the maiden said.

Ning nodded, then laughed.

Who cared about them?

These statues represented more than five thousand different sword-arts.

This was plenty to keep Ning occupied for a very, very long period of time. He would spend his time cultivating here. As for Fukai and Arroyo? They could just wait outside.

# Chapter 4: Ji Ning's Path to the Dao of the Sword

Ji Ning said hurriedly, "Please assist me in something, seniors. Please tell my retainer, Su Youji, not to panic. She should simply wait for me patiently."

"Sure, leave it to me." The formation-spirit maiden laughed. "Spend as much time here as you wish. Whenever you wish to leave the Allgod Estate, just let me know and I'll teleport both you and Su Youji together. Oh, right. World God Dragonbinder is a member of your group, right? If he leaves on his own, he'll probably be ambushed and killed as well."

"Right." Ning nodded. "Please have World God Dragonbinder wait ten years after Su Youji and I leave. Only then should he leave."

Ning wasn't going to leave until he became a World-level expert. By then, even if World God Dragonbinder did join them he wouldn't be of that much assistance.

After making his requests, Ning walked towards one of the walls of this enormous hall. The walls were all filled with enormous sculptures that bore the likenesses of many different cultivators.

"How marvelous." Ning couldn't help but sigh in amazement as he stared at the statues.

"His sculpting skills were simply inconceivable." Every single sculpture had its own unique sword-aura. They were all completely different.

For example, the fiery idol which Ning had acquired earlier contained eight different types of Fire-attribute intent, as well as an incredibly powerful technique. As for these thousands of sculptures, every single sculpture contained a unique sword-intent. They didn't actually contain any specific sword-arts, but for an expert of the Dao of the Sword such as Ning, every single engraving and carving on those enormous statues was a sword-art.

"Explosive and dominating."

Ning stared at the sculpture before him. This sculpture had required more than ten thousand strokes of the sculptor blade in order to be created. Some of the strokes seemed rather crude and unsightly, but they slowly came together to form an increasingly marvelous whole. Clearly, as Daolord Allgod had watched this cultivator train, the Daolord had slowly gained an increasingly deeper understanding of the sword-arts involved.

“This one is ice-cold.”

“Ephemeral and carefree.”

“Strange and unpredictable.”

“Dark and shadowy.”

Ning stared at all of the surrounding sculptures, each one giving him a completely different feeling.

Ning was in no rush to meditate on them. He slowly strolled forward, carefully inspecting each statue.

This was a veritable sea of sword-arts!

Every single statue embodied a unique type of sword-art, and every single sword-art was incredibly profound. Ning was quite astute in judging these sword arts. He could tell that all of these sword-arts were at the level of a master-class World God’s sword-arts. The reason why it had taken Daolord Allgod so many chaos cycles on this project was because simply finding more than five thousand master-class World Gods of the Dao of the Sword was an incredibly time-consuming process. During this process, Daolord Allgod made a breakthrough in his Dao of the Sword, rising to the level of an new Samsara Daolord’s mastery of the sword. If he hadn’t made this breakthrough, he probably would’ve continued to hunt down more and more master-class World Gods.

Upon breaking through and finding his own path, he had understood the general direction which his own Dao of the Sword would follow.

.....

Outside the Allgod Estate.

Three figures were seated in the lotus position atop the clouds, their senses spread out to cover this entire chaosworld. If so much as a bug tried to fly out, they would immediately detect it.

These three were the blood-robed Arroyo, the gold-robed Fukai, and World God Boneplate.

They had immediately left the Allgod Estate, then ran into each other in the outside world. Fukai had wanted to fight with Arroyo, but Arroyo immediately began to berate him and curse at him. “You imbecile, I left the Allgod Estate before you. Would I be sitting here waiting for you if I had the Eternal blood? I would’ve left long ago! I didn’t get the damn blood. If you don’t believe me, I’ll swear a lifeblood oath, alright?!”

Arroyo was willing to compromise because he wanted to make use of Fukai’s strength! “That freak of an Elder God was the one to obtain the Eternal blood. If he’s the cautious type, he’ll probably stay inside the Allgod Estate until he becomes a World-level expert himself. He was already comparable to a master-class World God. Once he breaks through, he’ll probably be as strong as I am. Fukai, the two of us will need to join forces if we want to be able to shut him down.”

Fukai glowered. “Don’t worry, Arroyo. If neither of us can get the Eternal blood, both of us will die. But you are overestimating that Elder God’s abilities. Even if he does become a World-level expert, his sword-arts are far inferior to yours. He might have some incredibly powerful divine abilities or secret arts, but I wager he’ll at most become a supreme World God.”

Arroyo shook his head. “Don’t underestimate him. We can’t afford to make any mistakes.”

“Agreed.” Fukai nodded.

And so, the three of them had sat down in the clouds, setting up a permanent vigil over the entire chaosworld with their godsense.

After becoming a World God, one’s soul and divine power would join together and be able to detect distant ripples of power through something known as ‘godsense’. Chaos Immortals had something similar called



chaosense, but the two were essentially the same. However, if one's heartforce was able to break through to the sixth level then one would truly have incredibly scanning abilities that could catch anyone offguard!

These three were all extremely formidable figures. It must be understood that even the Daofathers of the Three Realms were capable of scanning the entire Three Realms with their senses. These three mighty World Gods naturally found it quite easy to keep a constant vigil over an entire chaosworld. In fact, they were also capable of completely locking down the space around the chaosworld and making it so that no one would be able to teleport out of it.

"Once he comes out, he dies!" Arroyo's eyes were filled with the crashing waves of a bloody sea.

"Kill him." Fukai's face was cold as well.

Either Ji Ning died or the two of them died! There were no other options!

Time passed on, day by day, but Ji Ning did not come out. As for the three World Gods, they waited like a trio of patient hunters, not growing restless at all.

.....

Within the Castrum Divinitus. Inside the Hall of Swords.

Ning was still slowly strolling through the hall, staring at each and every sculpture.

More than five thousand sword-arts, with no two sword-arts alike!

Ning was completely spellbound by what he saw. He felt as though he was swimming within a sea of knowledge. It was all too stunning. Ning had never felt this stunned before, not even when he had seen the many sword-arts which World God Northrest had created.

All of those sword-arts had been the product of a single cultivator, after all. These sword-arts were created by more than five thousand different cultivators. This was a completely different situation!

Every single cultivator had their own special insights into the Dao. They

might create many sword-arts, but in the end the sword-arts they created would belong within a single overarching system. However, these thousands of cultivators were all completely different individuals with completely different backgrounds, thoughts, insights, and sword-arts. This truly was an all-encompassing selection of sword-arts.

“Long, long ago... before the weapon known as the ‘sword’ even existed... a creature picked up a long, flat piece of metal and used it as a weapon. Slowly, certain mysteries and insights were developed for the application of this weapon, this ‘sword’. The first sword-arts began to be created, and over time it was qualified to be described as a Dao of its own, the Dao of the Sword...

“Countless years have gone past since then. The trillions of cultivators of the Endless Territories have passed down many generations of legacies, resulting in the Dao of the Sword becoming increasingly profound. Multiple Samsara Daolords have found their own paths within it, and deep within the primordial chaos there lies a place which holds the true essence of the sword...

“But in the end... all of it stems from this single, seemingly simple weapon – the sword.”

Ever since that day long ago when Ning’s understanding of the sword had changed, the entire Dao of the Sword had changed in his eyes.

Through these thousands of sword-arts, Ning could see how all the different sword-arts advanced from simplicity to complexity and profundity. The carvings which Daolord Allgod had created represented himself and how he slowly learned more and more about the sword. His earliest carvings were rather crude, but his later ones became quite marvelous. This made it even easier for Ning to understand and analyze them.

“So the tip of the sword can actually be used like this? That means ‘Blood Drop’ stance can be redefined in many new ways...

“So my ‘Shadowless’ stance isn’t sufficiently shadowless. This... this stance right here is what ‘shadowless’ truly means!”

Ning looked at one sword-art after another.

Everyone specialized in something different. Some sword-arts had truly reached the pinnacle in certain areas and exceeded Ning's wildest imaginations. For example, Ning's 'Blood Drop' stance could be described as a particularly ferocious and fast technique, but in this hall Ning saw at least a hundred different sword-arts that truly struck with the speed and strength of a celestial comet. These sword-arts were truly, incomparably dazzling.

This process of breaking down and comprehending the fundamental underpinnings of so many sword-arts resulted in Ning's own insights rising at an incredible pace. Prior to this, Ning had reached a bottleneck in his attempts to master the third stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the 'Great Firmament' stance. However, as Ning's insights into the sword continued to rise, he slowly but naturally came to grasp and completely understand this stance. He broke through! He was now completely capable of advancing to the World level.

However... Ning did not!

He was completely intoxicated and mesmerized by this sea of swords. He didn't want to let himself grow distracted.

He continued to mentally disassemble and inspect every single sword-art.

Slowly, a great tree began to take form within Ning's mind. This great tree was the 'true nature of the sword', and it started off with more than five thousand branches, each branch symbolizing a specific type of sword-art.

As Ning's insights continued to develop, some of the branches began to cluster together and grow into large boughs.

This was a truly priceless experience, an enormous bit of good fortune.

In fact, as far as Ning was concerned this experience was far more valuable to him than the Eternal blood. The Eternal blood was nothing more than a source of outside help, but these thousands of sculptures

would help him grow more personally powerful. The unsightly markings left atop the sculptures were especially helpful, because Daolord Allgod had personally left those markings as he had studied the Dao of the Sword. Thus, the first ones were fairly simple and allowed Ning to dissect them in a fairly easy fashion. If everything was incredibly profound and abstruse, there would've been no way for Ning to analyze them.

The great tree in Ning's mind which represent the Dao of the Sword began to grow larger and larger. More and more of the various branches began to congregate together and merge into large boughs. The branches began to grow fewer and fewer in number, from several thousand to several hundred, then to one hundred, then to a few dozen..."

Ning's mastery of the sword was constantly rising without him even being aware of it.

# Chapter 5: Art

Time flowed on.

A fiery-robed maiden was seated in the lotus position next to a bubbling river of lava. It was Flamefairy Su Youji, who was meditating within the Castrum Divinitus on the karmic fortune she had been blessed with.

Su Youji stared in front of her, where a lotus was slowly swiveling within the bed of lava.

“This place is indeed a blessed place for anyone seeking to meditate on the Dao of Fire.” Su Youji frowned slightly. “However, no matter how hard I try I am unable to make any further improvements whatsoever. Ugh. According to what the formation-spirit of Castrum Divinitus said, Master is currently meditating as well. I wonder how long he will take. It has already been more than three thousand years!”

Right.

Su Youji had been in the Castrum Divinitus for more than a thousand years already.

After spending a bit of time firming up her foundation, she had gained the power of an ordinary World-level cultivator. After spending nearly three thousand years meditating in this location, a blessed place for meditating on the Dao of Fire, Su Youji had advanced to become comparable to an elite World-level cultivator.

It must be understood that although Daolord Allgod was not skilled in the Dao of the Sword, he was incredibly talented in the Dao of Lightning, the Dao of Fire, and many other Daos. Su Youji had benefited greatly from her exposure to this place.

“I suppose I’ll just have to keep waiting.” Su Youji had no other options.

.....

“It’s been three thousand years, but he still hasn’t come out.” Arroyo, Fukai, and Boneplate were still quietly keeping a watch over the entire chaosworld from their position above the clouds.

Fukai had a gloomy look on his face. “I imagine that this freak of an Elder God suspects something, which is why he insists on delaying and remaining within the Allgod Estate. However, breaking through to become a World God isn’t an easy feat, even for a freak like him. Three thousand years? It is entirely possible that he might spend thirty thousand years or three hundred thousand years without making a breakthrough.”

“Cut the crap and just keep waiting,” Arroyo said coldly.

Both of them felt tremendous pressure, and this pressure caused their hearts to become filled with an intense desire to kill.

“All of those old bastards want to acquire the divine blood of the Eternal, but none of them dare to come in person. All they dare to do is send World-level experts like us for it.” Fukai was rather resentful.

“Right. They even made acquiring the Eternal blood part of our Awakening test.” Arroyo shook his head. “This is the Badlands Territory, and Daolord Badlands is one of the most skilled Numerancy experts of the entire Endless Territories. If any of those old bastards dared to enter the Badlands Territory, Daolord Badlands would probably be able to divine it right away.”

“Right.” Fukai nodded. Daolord Badlands was a very frightening person indeed.

The Endless Territories was an incredibly vast place. Not even Daolord Allgod would’ve dared to claim that he was the most powerful Daolord of the Endless Territories. Daolord Badlands, however, was ranked as one of the top three Numerancy experts of this entire realm! Numerancy experts like him would easily be able to predict and calculate when danger was coming without even needing to leave the safety of his own home. The Aeonians were the hated foes of the entire Dao Alliance. If any Aeonian dared to enter this place, he would find it almost impossible to avoid the Numerancy divinations of Daolord Badlands.

In addition, this was one of the central regions of the Dao Alliance. Once the Aeonian’s presence was discovered, there would be no way for him to escape.

This was why Aeonians, as a race, generally tried to avoid the terrifying members of the Dao Alliance whose Numerancy skills made them virtually omniscient. Only the truly terrifying members of their race who were comparable to Daolord Allgod in his prime would dare to trespass through places like this.

“We have no one to blame but ourselves for not being able to Awaken ourselves,” Fukai sent mentally. “If we were able to become true Samsara Daolords on our own, Awakening to become true members of the Aeonian race, we wouldn’t have to risk our lives to pass this trial in such a manner.”

“Mm.” Arroyo nodded.

The two of them could rely on Pseudo Samsara Pills to make their breakthrough, but if they did so they would have almost no potential for any future breakthroughs. There would be no way for them to truly Awaken, nor would they be acknowledged as members of the Aeonian race.

They had to rely on themselves.

The alternate option was to have the Aeonian Kingdom help them Awaken, but an enormous price would need to be paid. Thus, the Aeonian Kingdom had given them a test. They were to bring back the Eternal blood of Emperor Melobo, and if they succeeded the Aeonian Kingdom would help one of them Awaken! The Eternal blood wasn’t that important to the Dao Alliance, but it was incredibly important to the Aeonian Kingdom, enough so that they would be willing to pay the price necessary to help one of their descendants Awaken.

Many of their descendants had done everything they could to fight over this mission. In the end, it had been Fukai and Arroyo who had managed to succeed in having it assigned to them.

According to the orders given by the Aeonian Kingdom, if they succeeded in acquiring the Eternal blood their status would skyrocket, and they would be Awakened to become true members of the Aeonian race.

But if they failed... they would die!

“Fukai, as per the lifeblood oath we swore all those years ago, once that freak of an Elder God appears we’ll have to work together to seize the Eternal blood from him. Once we acquire it, we’ll fight to the death. The survivor will take the Eternal blood back to the Aeonian Kingdom.” Arroyo looked at Fukai.

“Naturally.” Fukai felt quite confident as well. In a true life-and-death battle, he would unleash every single ability he had to offer. He truly didn’t fear anyone below the Samsara Daolord level of power.

“Three thousand years is nothing. Even if we wait thirty thousand years or three hundred thousand years, it would be worth it.” A cold light flashed through Arroyo’s eyes.

.....

Arroyo and Fukai waited impatiently on the outside. From the inside, Su Youji was left to speculate on how long she would have to wait for her master.

Ning, however, was completely absorbed within that sea of sword-arts.

He had never experienced something like this before!

Never in his entire life had he felt so confident in his own sword-arts.

Whoosh.

Ning appeared out of nowhere within the hall, then turned to stare at the thousands of sculptures on the four walls. At the very center of the hall there was a large pagoda-shaped tower. This was the Heavengazer Tower of Radiance.

Ning had spent almost every minute of every day meditating within the Heavengazer Tower, as he knew that completely dissecting and mastering these thousands of different sword-arts would require an incredibly long period of time. He naturally was going to make use of the Heavengazer Tower’s time compression abilities.

“I’ve finally finished meditating on every single sculpture, and I’ve reached my limit for now.” Ning waved his hand, putting aside the



Heavengazer Tower.

Ning was filled with boundless vigor and excitement. As he stared at the surrounding statues, he bowed slightly and said, "Thank you, senior Allgod. If it wasn't for you collecting all these sword-arts, how could I, Ji Ning, possibly have gained sudden enlightenment today?"

Ning was being quite modest in describing himself as having 'gained sudden enlightenment' today. There was nothing sudden about the hard work he had put in.

As a saying on Earth went, comparisons can be deadly. What were the strengths and weaknesses of a sword-art? An amateur wouldn't be able to tell just by looking at it. Only by completely dissecting these sword-arts and carefully comparing them to each other would you slowly discover that while this sword-art was exceedingly profound in this area, it had certain flaws in other areas.

Why was it strong?

Why was it weak?

After dissecting all of those sword-arts, Ning had gained certain yardsticks which he could use to judge the qualities of various sword-arts. Slowly, he gained an increasingly deeper level insight into the Dao of the Sword. In fact, Ning now had a complete, systemic view of the Dao of the Sword that belonged to him and him alone.

These thousands of sword-arts could be divided up into several general categories. In the end, Ning had divided those five thousand-plus sword-arts into twelve primary categories. After ascertaining that his judgments were correct, Ning suddenly felt as though wide panorama had opened up before him. He almost felt as though no sword-arts were too mysterious for him to understand! Even if there were some which were so profound that he would not be able to understand them at present, if he was given enough time he would thoroughly master it!

This self-confidence came into being after he had finished visualizing these thousands of sword-arts.

“Let me test it all out using the [Nameless] sword-art and Violetjewel’s quintessence core.” Ning smiled slightly. In recent years, he hadn’t spent any time truly focusing on the [Nameless] sword-art. At most, he would just turn a small part of his attention to it when he learned something that would be relevant for it. Despite that, he had still long ago mastered the third stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the ‘Great Firmament’ stance.

“The fourth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art – ‘Horizon’s End’. Quite profound, really.”

Ning quickly began to work on dissecting this sword-art, starting from the basic essence of the sword and then slowly working up to mentally executing the technique.

He spent a total of twelve hours on it.

“So that’s how it works. The creator of this sword-art truly was an incredible figure. This fourth stance is far more profound than those thousands of sword-arts I just finished analyzing.” Ning sighed softly in amazement. Still, he knew that although those thousands of sword-arts weren’t particularly profound in comparison, they had still served to help broaden his horizons and let him get a deeper understanding of the true nature of the sword.

It had only taken him twelve short hours for him to master the fourth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art.

“The fifth stance, then?” Ning began to meditate on the fifth stance, but a short while later he gave it up. “Even World God Northrest himself was only able to master the fifth stance. During the past three thousand years, I’ve been meditating in seclusion but haven’t gained any practical combat experience.”

Violetjewel suddenly appeared in Ning’s hands. “I suppose I should take a look at my sword’s quintessence core.”

Ning carefully attuned himself to the savage, murderous, yet exalted sword-intent that lay hidden within Violetjewel’s quintessence core. In the past, it was extremely hard for him to attune to it, but it was now noticeably easier. It took him a full day before he felt as though he could

no longer make any further improvements or gain a better understanding of it... but the insights he did gain were more than enough.

Soon, Ning began to develop a new sword-stance of his own.

“This stance shall be the second stance of the [Quintessence Sword-Intent]. Since I developed it here in the Allgod Estate, let it be named the Allgod stance,” Ning murmured softly.

In his heart, Ning felt a hint of gratitude.

If it hadn't been for Daolord Allgod spending many chaos cycles of hard work in watching master-class World Gods train in the Dao of the Sword, then laboriously carve these thousands of sculptures, how could Ning have been able to gain such tremendous enlightenment in such a short period of time?

But of course, this was also because Ning's own understanding of the sword was a pure one that guided him straight to the true essence of the sword. There might be many other experts of the Dao of the Sword who had more profound insights than Ning, but when they saw these statues they would probably say, “I have my own path already. These differ from my Dao of the Sword.”

“Haha... I had planned on leaving this place after becoming a World God, but I didn't expect that this place would be far more valuable to me than the drop of Eternal blood.” Ning let out a heartfelt laugh. Not only had he mastered the third stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, he had even mastered the fourth stance. The third stance was all that was needed to become a World God!

These past three thousand years had been a truly transformative period of time for Ning.

His sword had now truly gained a soul of its own.

He had established a firm foundation for becoming a peerless expert in the Dao of the Sword in the future.

“Mm. Time to break through to the World level.” Ning sat down in the lotus position, calming his heart and soul.

# Chapter 6: Breakthrough, World Level!

BOOM!!!

The heavens shook and the earth quaked as the chaos energy in the area began to oscillate wildly.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Two figures suddenly appeared in the plaza before the Castrum Divinitus. It was the bald three-eyed man and the formation-spirit maiden. Both raised their heads to stare deep into the castle.

“What a torrent of chaos energy.” The maiden let out a sigh. “This is causing a far greater disturbance than is usually seen when a cultivator breaks through to the World level.”

“You can’t compare Ji Ning to ordinary World-level cultivators,” the three-eyed man said.

It must be understood that they were located within the Allgod Estate, but they were still able to see the chaos energy surging violently. One could imagine how huge the disturbance outside was! When the Flamefairy had made her breakthrough, the disturbance had been much smaller.

.....

“A breakthrough? It must be Ji Ning of Vastheaven Palace.” The formation-spirit of the Ten Thousand Mountains appeared at the top of a mountain peak in white robes. He raised his head to stare at the chaos energy pulsating through the skies.

.....

“The chaos energy seems to be shaking quite violently.” Even though Su Youji was located within the Castrum Divinitus, she could still sense that something was happening. “Did someone make a breakthrough? Was it Master?”

.....

Outside the Allgod Estate. The disturbance in the rest of the chaosworld was far greater than the disturbance within the estate itself. An utterly enormous chaos vortex had appeared high above the chaosworld, covering the entirety of the skies. Just looking at it would cause one's heartrate to speed up.

"What a huge event." The blood-robed Arroyo, the gold-robed Fukai, and World God Boneplate all raised their heads to stare coldly at the skies.

"That freak of an Elder God must have made his breakthrough," Fukai growled.

"Most likely. Good. Now that he's made his breakthrough, he'll be coming out soon." Cold light flashed through Arroyo's eyes. "He lives up to being an Elder God who can battle master-class World Gods to a standstill. Look at the size of that thing! He has to be close to being on par with me by now."

"Right." Fukai nodded as well.

Both had extraordinary backgrounds and were extraordinarily talented. When they had made their breakthroughs, they had caused similarly shocking disturbances to the local flow of chaos energy.

.....

The Castrum Divinitus. Within the Hall of Swords.

Ning was seated in the lotus position, an endless torrent of chaos energy swirling around him and into his body.

Rumble...

Within his Jindan region. This had previously been a beautiful, peaceful place, filled with islands that floated within a sea of elemental energy. However... everything was now being destroyed and returned to the primordial chaos from whence they came.

The entire Jindan region had been reduced to a region of utter chaos.

"Sword-seed!"

A seed had appeared out of nowhere. This seed was a sword-seed that

would naturally form once one reached the fifth stage of swordforce, the 'Sword God' stage. Generally speaking, it would be extremely hard to see it with the naked eye. However, now that the entire region had been reduced to primordial chaos it was now much more noticeable.

The entire region of chaos energy swirled around the sword-seed. It was the center of the entire region.

"The sixth stage of swordforce – Sword World!" A voice echoed throughout this world of chaos.

Whoosh....

This seed surrounded by sword-ki began to expand and transform. It slowly began to split open, allowing a sapling to emerge from its shell. Soon, the sword-seed had completely transformed into a small tree that was growing at an incredible pace. Its many branches began to furiously extend outwards as Ning poured his insights regarding the Dao of the Sword into it, nourishing it and allowing this tree which represented his Dao of the Sword to grow nonstop.

Rumble...

The tree continued to grow at an incredible pace, becoming thirty meters tall. Three hundred. Nine hundred. Eighteen hundred. Three thousand...

Ning's insights into the Dao of the Sword were simply astonishing. As a result, his Dao-tree was growing to a similarly astonishing size.

Ordinary trees allowed the ground they were rooted in to be stable, while a Dao-tree would allow a Chaos Immortal's Jindan chaos region to be stable. The presence of the Dao-tree would allow the Jindan chaos region to continuously grow and expand.

This Dao-tree represented a cultivator's insights into the Dao!

Ning's path was the Dao of the Sword, and so this tree was a tree which represented the Dao of the Sword! Of course, in the future Ning's Jindan chaos region could give birth to other Dao-trees as well, ones which embodied the Daos of Water or Lightning. However, at present Ning clearly was not sufficiently enlightened with regards to these Daos. His

other Daos were not at the World level yet. He might be able to form Dao-seeds, but there was no way for them to bloom and grow into trees.

The height of a Dao-tree represented a cultivator's level of insights into a Dao.

Normal cultivators who had just broken through to become World-level cultivators would generally just have Dao-trees that were around a thousand meters tall! Only after stabilizing their foundation would their Dao-tree grow to become three thousand meters tall.

A Dao-tree of three thousand meters meant that one had become a 'normal' World-level cultivator.

A Dao-tree of thirty thousand meters meant that one was comparable to elite World-level cultivators.

A Dao-tree of 108,000 meters meant that one had reached the level of full mastery as a World-level cultivator.

For World-level cultivators, Dao-trees growing to 108,000 meters was the maximum possible limit. No World-level cultivator's Dao-tree could ever grow any higher. Only if one found one's own Dao and underwent a fundamental transformation would this limit be breached, allowing the Dao-tree to grow even taller and thicker. This was the level of the Samsara Daolord.

Rumble...

This Dao-tree became an increasingly towering presence within this region of primordial chaos, sprouting more and more leaves and branches. Every single branch represented a different sword-art which Ning had mastered. Because Ning had created many sword-arts of his own and had mastered thousands of sword-arts in the Hall of Swords, his Dao-tree was filled with leafy foliage.

15,000 meters... 24,000 meters... 30,000 meters...

The Dao-tree continued to grow.

It contained all of Ning's insights into the Dao of the Sword, and it

clearly had an incredible foundation. When it reached 63,000 meters, it finally came to a halt and stopped growing taller, but its leaves and branches continued to stretch out in every direction.

It had three branches that were particularly thick. These three boughs represented the [Nameless] sword-art, the [Quintessence Sword-Intent], and the [Brightmoon] sword-art.

The bough that represented the [Nameless] sword-art emanated a boundless yet calm sword-intent.

The bough that represented the [Quintessence Sword-Intent] radiated an aura of savagery and violence.

As for the bough which represented the [Brightmoon] sword-art, it seemed to represent the vastness of the void itself, making it impossible for others to fully comprehend it.

“63,000 meters? It seems my insights into the Dao of the Sword are superior to that of most elite World-level cultivators, but is still quite a distance away from the level of full mastery.” Ning understood that in cultivation, the latter stages were always the hardest ones. Still, he wasn’t too far away from the level of full mastery.

“My insights into the Dao are somewhat inferior to the insights of master-class World Gods... but no matter how profound your insights are, what really matters is your ability to apply them.”

It was common for two master-class World Gods to execute sword-arts that were world’s apart in power.

Ning had mastered the fourth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the ‘Horizon’s Edge’, as well as the second stance of the [Quintessence Sword-Intent], the ‘Allgod’ stance. On a technical level, he was on par with the Starlord of Fogstone or God Emperor Blacklotus. Those two had been roughly on par with each other in terms of technique; Blacklotus’ advantage primarily came from the fact that he had an Eternal weapon.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The entire chaos region began to furiously expand, devouring more and



more chaos energy from the outside world.

At a time like this, having a first tier, second tier, or third tier Jindan no longer made any difference. Upon becoming a Chaos Immortal, everything would return to the primordial chaos from whence all things arose.

Generally speaking, most Chaos Immortals would have a chaos region of a certain predetermined size. As their insights expanded and their Dao-tree grew, the chaos region would naturally grow as well. Because Ning had fused seventeen clones together, his heartforce and his Jindan regions were qualitatively superior to that of most cultivators, resulting in a larger chaos region. The Chaos Immortal energy he could draw upon would also be purer than that of most cultivators.

Training in a technique that allowed one to have many different clones then merging them together would indeed result in one becoming a significantly more powerful cultivator.

Ning had ‘merely’ merged seventeen clones, and so he hadn’t become too ridiculously powerful.

Techniques like the [Thousand Bodies Sutra] allowed for the creation of a thousand clones. Once all those clones were merged together, one would be enhanced to a ridiculous level. Those who had successfully trained in the [Thousand Bodies Sutra] then broke through to become World Gods would have bodies that were comparable to the bodies of Samsara Daolords! This was proof of how truly incredible this technique was. Because Ning’s own body was merely formed from seventeen different clones, his body was merely strengthened by a single small level.

Whoosh.

Ning could sense that the entirety of his Jindan region had been converted into primordial chaos. His Dao-tree was more than sixty thousand meters tall, and it was able to stabilize the entire region. A large amount of Chaos Immortal energy had taken form as well.

“This feels wonderful.” Ning could sense his soul rapidly increasing in power thanks to it being nourished by his Chaos Immortal energy.

“Mmmm. I’ve already made my breakthrough as a Ki Refiner. Time to break through as a Fiendgod Body Refiner as well.”

Ning was now at such an incredibly high level of insight that he was able to easily sense that every single cell in his body was filled with an urgent desire to transform and become stronger.

Boom!

.....

Things had just started to calm down in the outside world, and the flow of chaos energy had finally started to stabilize. All of a sudden, the chaos energy began to pulsate wildly once more as an enormous amount of it was drawn into the Allgod Estate.

“Eh?”

“Is that...”

The faces of Arroyo, Fukai, and Boneplate all tightened.

“It seems he simultaneously made his breakthrough as a Ki Refiner and as a Fiendgod Body Refiner,” Arroyo said coldly. Ki Refiners generally found it somewhat easier to make their breakthroughs, while Fiendgod Body Refiners found it a bit more difficult. Arroyo himself had first broken through to become a Chaos Immortal, then spent ten thousand more years in training before breaking through to become a World God as well. Ning simply had too high a level of insight into the Dao, which was why he was able to easily break through as both a Chaos Immortal and as a World God.

“So what if he did? He still has to die.” Fukai’s eyes were filled with a murderous look. Since Ji Ning had made his breakthrough, he was sure to come out soon.

# Chapter 7: Leaving the Castrum Divinitus

With the Sword World serving as his core, Ji Ning began to remold his divine power.

His divine power began to undergo a fundamental change, transforming him into a higher level of existence.

Boom!

Ning's entire body suddenly burst apart, then instantly solidified into a total of a hundred jewels. These were jewels formed from divine power – godgems! A flood of chaos energy surrounded these jewels, causing more and more godgems to rapidly form.

The Dao-tree was the core of a Chaos Immortal.

The godgems formed the core of a World God.

But of course, if one was a dual refiner one would have both types of cores.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! One godgem after another continued to coalesce. Every single godgem had to be infused with sufficient insights regarding the Dao of the Sword, but the insights within each jewel had to be different. Thus, the more insights into the Dao of the Sword you had, the more godgems you would create.

Newly ascended cultivators who broke through would be able to generate a few hundred godgems.

Cultivators who had stabilized their foundations would generally have a thousand godgems and be 'standard' World Gods.

Upon gaining a total of ten thousand godgems, one would be at the level of an elite World God.

At thirty-six thousand gems, one would have reached full mastery as a World God.

In the end, Ning formed a total of exactly 21,192 godgems. This was quite comparable to the height of his Dao-tree, and was what Ning had

expected. Thanks to the fact that he had fused seventeen clones together, the divine power contained within his godgems was slightly purer than the divine power 'ordinary' World Gods had.

“Condense!”

The twenty-one thousand godgems that were scattered throughout the area instantly began to surge to a central location, joining together into a human figure that had the form of a white-robed youth.

“While I’m making my breakthrough, I have an unlimited amount of chaos energy at my disposal. I need to hurry up and use it to fill up my azureflower region.” The azureflower seal appeared on Ning’s forehead as he sent his senses into the azureflower region within his sea of consciousness.

A single azure flower was fluttering within his sea of consciousness. It now looked even more dazzlingly beautiful than it had before.

Within this azure flower was the vast azureflower region. As Ning poured his divine power and his Immortal energy into it, both were absorbed and converted into that misty energy. The power of the mist took Ning’s breath away; it was now unfathomably more powerful than it had been when he had been an Elder God.

A short while later, the mist condensed to form a single liquid drop. Ning could now sense a slight pressure weighing down upon his azureflower region.

When he had been an Elder God, he had only been able to manifest a maximum of thirty-six drops of this azureflower liquid.

“I wonder how many I’ll be able to manifest now.” Ning continued to condense more and more drops of azureflower liquid, pouring all of his divine power and Immortal energy into the azureflower region as he furiously drew upon the chaos energy of the outside world.

When one was making a breakthrough, one would have the ability to directly draw upon virtually limitless amounts of chaos energy! The cultivator making the breakthrough would be able to swallow as much of

it as he could handle. When he could no longer absorb any more, everything would naturally come to an end.

“What is taking so long?”

“How can Ji Ning be absorbing so much chaos energy?”

Su Youji, Dragonbinder, the formation-spirits of the Allgod Estate, Arroyo, Fukai... all of them were uniformly stunned at the amount of time Ji Ning was spending in absorbing chaos energy.

However, what they didn't realize was that the chaos energy was entering Ning's body at an unprecedented rate. He had actually absorbed far more of it than they had imagined.

108 drops!

This was the new limit, the maximum number of azureflower drops which the azureflower region could hold. Every single drop of 'water' contained an utterly overwhelming amount of energy; Ning had to use up nearly his entire reserve of divine power and Immortal energy in order to create a single drop. In other words, the amount of energy the azureflower region had just absorbed was a hundred times as much energy Ning would've 'normally' absorbed after breaking through to become a World-level cultivator!

But of course, there were some cultivators who deliberately slowed down the energy absorption process when they made their breakthroughs, so as to get a better feeling for the overall process. Thus, while Ji Ning was furiously absorbing as much chaos energy as he could, Su Youji and the others all merely thought that he was just taking a long time. They didn't truly understand how much chaos energy he had sucked in.

“This feeling...”

Ning stood there within the Hall of Swords, a stunned look on his face. He lightly balled his fist together. BOOM! He could sense that he had enough power in his fingers to effortlessly crush a chaos star to pieces.

“This is ridiculous. How can this azureflower mist energy be so powerful?”

Ning had merged seventeen of the clones created by the [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods]. Now that he had broken through become a World God, he had the power of a half-step Daolord. And yet, when Ning activated the power of the azureflower mist energy his body underwent an utterly earthshaking transformation.

When the power of the azureflower mist energy filled his body, his body greedily drank it all in like a parched land drinking in the rain after a long drought. The azureflower mist energy filled him with vitality and life energy, giving his entire body such a terrifying amount of strength that Ning himself was frightened by it.

“With the azureflower mist energy reinforcing my body, I should be as fast as a Samsara Daolord,” Ning mused. “Where did these Nine Chaos Seals come from? They are ridiculously powerful!”

This technique was not only of great benefit to Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals, it was of just as much benefit to World-level cultivators. This technique was simply unearthly. Someone who had mastered the [Thousand Bodies Sutra] would have a body comparable to a newly ascended Samsara Daolord... and Ning’s azureflower seal was just as marvelously effective as that sutra!

“Daoist Three Purities said that he found it within the primordial chaos. It seems that I should send my Primaltwin to wander through the primordial chaos surrounding the Three Realms. I wonder if I can find the original Nine Chaos Seal.” Ning had a feeling that these nine ridiculously powerful chaos seals had to have extraordinary backgrounds. His Primaltwin was already located in the primordial chaos outside the Three Realms and had nothing to do. He might as well send it out exploring.

In the instant that he made his breakthrough, his Primaltwin had also made its breakthrough. It now was also supported and reinforced by azureflower mist energy, giving it a level of power that was extremely close to that of Ning’s true body. Its only weakness lay in the fact that it didn’t have an Eternal weapon.

“I can’t get too cocky though. The endless primordial chaos is filled with

many mysteries. The [Thousand Bodies Sutra], the Nine Chaos Seals... although such incredibly powerful techniques are very rare, they still exist. I was lucky enough to acquire one but I can't let myself become too arrogant. As the saying goes, there's always a taller mountain somewhere. Daolord Allgod was someone who was capable of slaying Eternal Emperors!" Ning quickly calmed down and quelled his excited emotions.

There were too many freakishly powerful figures in the endless primordial chaos. Hell, the entire race of Aeonians actually devoured Samsara Daolords for sustenance! As for Daolord Badlands, he was the number three Numerancy expert of the entire Endless Territories.

There were many might figures of simply incredible power. Ning might have a bit of power now, but compared to them he still wasn't qualified to behave in a prideful, arrogant manner.

Hiss. Pop. A pool of lava bubbled and boiled, and next to it sat Su Youji. The Flamefairy was still waiting.

"That should've been Master making his breakthrough. He should be coming out soon, right?" Su Youji was waiting eagerly.

"Su Youji." A figure suddenly appeared, materializing directly above the lava. It was the nearly-nude, barefoot maiden. "Come, it is time to leave."

"Was it Master who made the breakthrough?" Su Youji asked.

"Yes." The maiden nodded.

Space twisted and distorted around her as she was forcibly teleported away once more.

"Eh?" Everything around her became blurred and distorted. By the time it all came back into focus, Su Youji realized that she had returned to the great plaza in front of the Castrum Divinitus, the one which had held the trial of the Samsara Grinders.

"Master." Su Youji immediately saw the white-robed youth who stood nearby.

Ning was just standing there, a sword on his back and an mighty aura of

tremendous power radiating from his body. This was the aura of a World God.

“Congratulations, Master!” Su Youji said delightedly, “The Allgod Estate truly was a blessed place for the two of us. We both broke through to the World level here.”

“Yes, it truly was a blessed place.” Ning couldn’t help but think back to the Hall of Swords and its thousands of sword-arts. That place truly had been of tremendous assistance to him.

“Senior.” Ning looked at the nearby formation-spirit maiden. Although the formation-spirit didn’t have a cultivation base, it had lived for far longer than even many Samsara Daolords had. Here within the Allgod Estate, it could probably wipe out most Samsara Daolords with ease. For him to respectfully address the spirit as ‘senior’ was just proper.

“Please send me and Su Youji to the Grove of Monoliths within the Fog Sea,” Ning said.

“You are going to go to the Fog Sea first?” The maiden was puzzled.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Mm. You might as well go solidify your foundation in the Fog Sea, I suppose.” The maiden nodded. “Go ahead.” After speaking, she waved a finger and caused space to twist and distort around Ji Ning and Su Youji. It was like a whirlpool had formed around them, swallowing them up and causing them to disappear.

.....

Mist billowed everywhere. This was the Fog Sea region of the Allgod Estate.

A series of spatial waves suddenly rippled out from a desolate patch of land, followed by Ji Ning and Su Youji appearing out of nowhere.

“Mm.” Ning could clearly sense the ripples generated by the nearby Mirrorsnow Painting. He couldn’t help but laugh. “That bugbeast is still hiding within the Grove of Monoliths. It has been several thousand years,



but he remains hidden there.”

The Grove of Monoliths was a dangerous place, but Ning no longer feared it. The main reason he had come to the Allgod Estate was to acquire the Mirrorsnow Painting, after all!

“You scared that bugbeast witless, Master. If it hadn’t been for World God Foxblaze and his friend accosting us, the bugbeast probably would’ve died long ago. It knows we have a method to track it, so of course it is unwilling to leave the Grove,” Su Youji said.

# Chapter 8: The Battle in the Grove of Monoliths

“Come, let’s go to the Grove of Monoliths.” Ji Ning laughed as he began to walk towards the Grove.

“Are we really going there, Master?” Su Youji was rather worried. She had started to grow a bit nervous as soon as she had heard Ning ask the formation-spirit girl to teleport them straight to the Fog Sea. The Grove was one of the truly dangerous parts of the Fog Sea, and even supreme World Gods would only have a decent chance at best to escape from that place alive. It truly was a deadly place to venture into.

“Yes.” Ning glanced at Su Youji, then smiled. “But you won’t be needed for this battle. Just go into the estate-world when the battle begins. If you stay by my side, I’ll be distracted because I would need to protect you.”

Ning’s words were quite simply and ordinary, but Su Youji could sense the absolute self-confidence and the absolute dominance inherent in those words.

Her master had just broken through to become a World God, yet already possessed such incredible faith in himself?

Su Youji nodded slowly. “Alright. I’ll listen to you, Master. I still hope that you’ll be careful in your journey through the Grove.” She stared very carefully at Ning as she spoke, trying to find some clues from his aura regarding his current level of strength. Ning’s aura was that of a World God’s, but it didn’t seem as though there had been any other major changes.

Oh. One change was that Ning seemed calmer than before. Even though he was in a dangerous place, he seemed completely calm and unflappable.

“Master, why are you carrying that sword on your back?” Su Youji suddenly noticed the biggest difference. In the past, Ning would instantly materialize his sword when entering combat. He never kept it on his back before.

“I’m training,” Ning said.

“Training?” Su Youji was puzzled. How could carrying a sword on your back be considered training? Still, she didn’t ask any more questions.

Ning was carrying the Eternal weapon ‘Violetjewel’ on his back. By staying in contact with it at all times, he was able to better familiarize himself and attune himself to the quintessence sword-intent hidden within the sword’s core at all times. He was attuned to it every day and every night

It must be understood that if a mortal carried a blade with him at all times to the point of holding it when sleeping, that mortal would also be able to develop an extremely terrifying saber-art.

Habits such as this were quite important. Ning wanted to be attuned to the quintessence sword-intent at all times, as this would allow him to comprehend it more quickly.

Right now, Violetjewel was the strongest weapon which Ning had!

The fourth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, ‘Horizon’s Edge’, was on the same level as the second stance of the [Quintessence Sword-Intent], the ‘Allgod’ stance. If Ning used a different sword to execute these two stances, they would be on par with each other in power. However, because the Allgod stance was developed based on the quintessence sword-intent within Violetjewel, it would be much stronger when Ning actually used Violetjewel and its quintessence core. When Ning used Violetjewel to execute the two stances the difference was actually quite great, with the Allgod stance capable of unleashing several times as much power.

“You have to be able to protect yourself on your path of cultivation. Otherwise, you’ll die an early death. I’ve now gained insight into both the [Nameless] sword-art and the [Quintessence Sword-Intent]. For now, I should favor the [Quintessence Sword-Intent]. It will let me unleash greater power in battle for now.” Although Ning was able to estimate how strong he had become, he didn’t know exactly how strong that was.

Only through battle would he be able to truly ascertain how strong he had grown.

“The Grove of Monoliths...” Ning stared towards a distant, fog-shrouded monolith that had been planted into the ground.

“Stay prepared. Have Blacksun and Wilddog do the same. All three of you should be ready to be summoned by me at a moment’s notice,” Ning said.

“Yes, Master. Be careful, Master.” Su Youji had a worried look on her face.

Ning chuckled, then waved his hand and collected her into his estate-world. He then turned and headed off by himself towards the Grove of Monoliths, a small smile playing on his lips.

Enormous monoliths were planted throughout the Grove of Monoliths, with tens thousand of them having been planted in total. Quite a few of them had powerful bugbeasts coiling atop them.

As for Ning, he strolled into the Grove as though he was entering his own private garden.

An avian beast with bright red claws was currently coiled around the top of a giant monolith that was a few hundred kilometers away from Ning. The creature’s eyes were shut in slumber, and every so often a few streams of fire would flick out from its nostrils as it exhaled, with the streams of fire swirling around an area of a hundred meters. As Ning moved towards the creature, he could sense it open its eyes. Its two eyes were filled with a cold, murderous look in them as it stared at the human cultivator who had trespassed on its territory.

“An Outsider...” The flying beast let out a low growl. “Die.”

Its black wings suddenly spread out as it shot forth like a dazzling streak of electric light, moving far faster than the limits of the Heavenly Daos. This avian creature was actually quite formidable, far more so than the crocodilian creature Ning had fought and pursued for the sword-ki painting. This creature had the power of an elite World God, giving it tremendous confidence in its abilities to deal with most Outsiders.

Even if it encountered someone stronger than it, it felt that it would at

most be slightly suppressed. Once the battle went on for an extended period of time, other bugbeasts would soon begin to arrive. By then, the Outsider cultivator would have to choose between fleeing or dying.

“KREE.” An ugly screeching sound rang out from the winged creature’s mouth as its enormous bright red claws ripped towards Ning. As for its black wings, it swept them towards Ning’s head.

Ning continued to walk forward in a very calm manner. Why wouldn’t he be calm? Even when he was an Elder God, he wouldn’t have feared a bugbeast like this, much less now.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Spatial ripples spread out from those giant claws as they tore through the air and struck with power comparable to that of Rocky’s.

Finally, Ning moved.

Slash!

Ning’s arms suddenly stretched out to become many dozens of meters long, and his fingers chopped out like the edges of a sharp blade. He used his hand to stab directly into the avian creature’s brain, then pulled his hand back. A huge hole had appeared in the avian beast’s head, with the insides of its skull completely destroyed. Life fled from its eyes and it died on the spot.

Although bugbeasts were born and bred for combat and possessed incredibly powerful bodies, they had their own weak spots as well.

A dull look of amazement could still be seen in the creature’s now-lifeless eyes as its corpse fell from the skies, kicking up a storm of dust as it slammed into the ground.

Ning gave it a glance.

“Horizon’s Edge. This truly is a formidable technique created by an ancient power. It really is formidable!” Ning couldn’t help but mentally praise the technique. Just now, he had used his fingers to simulate the strikes of a sword. Because of his Seventh Cycle of the [Starseizing Hand], his two hands were now comparable to Dao weapons. Bugbeasts like these

weren't worthy of him drawing his true weapons.

The Horizon's Edge technique could be summarized in one word – fast!

As soon as the sword struck, it would instantly be able to reach the very edges of the horizon! This is what was meant by the name, 'Horizon's Edge'. Ji Ning had simply struck out with his right hand, but the avian beast was given no chance to dodge or block whatsoever. The azureflower mist energy had given Ning incredible speed and power to begin with, and when he matched it with the Horizon's Edge technique, he was able to strike even faster. Even bugbeasts with incredibly powerful bodies such as the avian creature would be unable to dodge it in time.

“AROOOO!”

“GWRAAAAR!”

“KILL THE INVADER!”

“KILL THE OUTSIDER!”

The ripples generated by this sudden battle quickly spread out to cover the entire ten thousand kilometers of the Grove of Monoliths, causing the bugbeasts all began to furiously converge upon this location. This was the most terrifying aspect of the Grove! Formidable World-level cultivators could deal with these bugbeasts one or two at a time, but when they surrounded you and converged upon you in such a manner, you would have no choice but to flee even if you had the power of a supreme World God.

“Interesting. I'll use you all to test myself out and see how powerful I have become.” Ning continued to stroll forwards, moving towards the direction of the crocodilian beast.

More and more bugbeasts began to appear within his field of vision. Some had enormous scaled wings, some crawled through the ground like centipedes, some were plant-type creatures with green leaves, while some looked almost humanoid and jogged across the land. All of them had auras of incredible power, but none of them were in a rush to immediately charge towards Ning. Instead, they continued to gather in number in the

area around him. Ten of them. Twenty of them. Thirty of them...

They circled around Ning but didn't attack.

"How crafty. Even though bugbeasts are stupid creatures, the ones who can survive to reach the World level are all quite crafty." Ning chuckled as he glanced at the thirty-plus bugbeasts who had already arrived. All of these powerful creatures were staring intently at Ning, who remained as placid as a calm pool of water.

"Kill."

"Kill him!"

Finally, they moved. A total of thirty-nine bugbeasts had arrived by now, and one of them was a towering humanoid bugbeast whose entire body was covered with sharp spikes. As it let out a furious howl, the other thirty-eight bugbeasts instantly began to charge straight for Ning.

Ning just stood there without moving, allowing these thirty-nine bugbeasts to attack him en masse.

Whoosh.

Suddenly, Ning stretched his hand out. His palms transformed in size, looking almost like utterly enormous palm-leaf fans that were filled with enough power to easily crush any chaosworld to bits. When he struck out with these titanic palms, the very skies themselves seemed to grow dim. At Ning's current level of mastery, every single strike was filled with inconceivably profound mysteries and insights. He sent a palm smashing towards the head of the first creature to arrive, a fast-moving four-legged unicorn-like beast. BOOM! The four-legged unicorn's head caved in so deep that it was pressed down through the neck into its chest. It died on the spot.

# Chapter 9: We Meet Again

The many bugbeasts began to swarm around Ji Ning. Some blasted streaks of energy from their mouths, while the bugbeast that was covered with green leaves suddenly sprouted many branches as it charged into close combat range.

It must be understood that during the trial of the Samsara Grinders, only master-class World Gods were capable of successfully fighting those many weak (but berserk) World-level golden warriors to a standstill. These bugbeasts, however, were far stronger than those golden warriors had been, with a small number actually being comparable to master-class World Gods themselves. One bad strike could knock you to the ground, and you would instantly be entangled by vines, branches, tails, and other flexible weapons. After that happened, you would be dead.

Swish.

A cruel shadow suddenly streaked out. Ning's fingers had pierced straight through the skull of a centipede-like bugbeast! The strike was simply too fast. As soon as Ning's fingers had moved, they had gone straight through the enemy's defenses.

Boom!

Ning's palms suddenly expanded to become enormous in size, and he furiously chopped down with the edge of his palm like a hatchet! The power of his blow smashed an airborne winged bugbeast directly into the ground, its body shattering apart into countless pieces.

Swish!

Ning's hands looked almost crystalline as they transformed into streaks of blade-light that lashed out, chopping straight through the head of the savage, humanoid-shaped creature that was completely covered with spikes.

It was a massacre. Ning's two hands were weapons of mass destruction, and the more he killed the more excited he became. He suddenly



manifested the [Three Heads, Six Arms] technique and began to slaughter any bugbeasts who dared to move close to him.

“I’ve been having a wonderful nap for the past chaos cycle. Why has it taken all of you so long to deal with this invader? Why is he still not dead?” A turtle-shaped bugbeast slowly flew towards Ning from afar, but moments later it came to a sudden halt as its beady little eyes widened. It could see that there were now more than eighty bugbeasts gathered in the area.

The area was littered with shattered corpses. Normally, bugbeasts loved to devour the corpses of other bugbeasts, but right now no one was even thinking of doing such a thing.

All of them had been terrified by the slaughter.

More than fifty bugbeasts had been slain, and that white-robed sword-bearing youth continued to hold the complete upper hand in the battle as he continued to slay even more.

“Run away!”

Finally, the first bugbeast broke ranks and began to flee. Instantly, the teetering morale of the remaining bugbeasts shattered. They had only dared to continue the fight because of so many others being present, but they now lost all their courage and began to flee in every which way.

“He’s freaking terrifying. He killed more than half of them!” The turtle was so frightened that he immediately turned tail and fled.

“Ahahaha...” Ning suddenly transformed into a shadowy blur, his speed reaching incredible heights as his six arms savagely struck out in every direction. In the blink of an eye, more than ten more bugbeasts fell to the ground, dead. In the end, only eight of the bugbeasts that had surrounded Ning were lucky enough to escape with their lives.

Ning let out a laugh.

That had felt good.

He had utterly dominated them and massacred them, in the process

getting a better understanding of his current level of power. During the trial of the Samsara Grinders, he had been able to easily defeat those golden-armored warriors, and he was now able to slaughter these bugbeasts with a similar degree of ease, including those master-class ones. They were like infants before him, easily slain by a casual blow.

This level of power completely and vastly surpassed that of a 'supreme' World God's. Even if God Emperor Blacklotus came back to life, Ning would be able to easily defeat and slay him without even using Violetjewel.

"Everyone kept on talking about how strong those bugbeasts are, but I'm much stronger than them. Even if I completely rely on raw brute force alone, I've reached the Samsara Daolord threshold of power. My sword-arts, however, can allow me to better unleash my true power." The reason why Ning was able to butcher these bugbeasts so easily was because he had the azureflower mist energy strengthening him as well as a terrifyingly strong divine body.

"Arroyo made certain breakthroughs on the Samsara Grinder and is now a transcendent World God. He probably has just barely reached the Samsara Daolord threshold of power as well. However, he can only reach that level when he unleashes his complete, full power in his strikes. Any random blow I unleash when using [Three Heads, Six Arms] is probably somewhat stronger than his full-force blows. If I was to use my Eternal weapon, Violetjewel... I think the power of my strikes would be enough to threaten even actual Samsara Daolords," Ning mused.

However, he would only be able to threaten a Samsara Daolord who had just recently made his breakthrough. True Samsara Daolords who had been Fiendgod Body Refiners would have divine bodies that were just as strong as Ning's, and they would generally have both Eternal weapons and more profound insights into the Dao! Given that they had other secret arts and divine abilities of their own... Ning was still some distance away from being able to battle them.

However, it was an indisputable fact that if Ning struck out with his sword, even Samsara Daolords would have to take his strike seriously.

“Flee.”

“Flee!”

The remaining bugbeasts in the Grove began to disperse and flee.

As for Ning, he could sense where the crocodilian creature was and the direction it was fleeing towards. Ning quickly advanced towards its direction, and on the way he was able to see quite a few magic treasures and weapons scattered throughout the grove. These were the spoils of war which the bugbeasts had taken from cultivators they had slain! Ning went ahead and collected them as he advanced through the Grove.

“That crocodile is still fleeing?” Ning’s speed suddenly skyrocketed.

Boom!

His speed instantly reached a terrifying new level as he blasted through the skies above the Grove. He almost instantly caught up with the blindly fleeing crocodilian bugbeast, which had been fleeing at its own top speed. “Who the hell was that invader, and why is he so strong? Everyone else is fleeing, so I guess I should flee as well. Right, right.” The crocodilian bugbeast hadn’t taken part in the fight, but it had begun to flee when the other creatures had fled.

Swoosh! Ning suddenly appeared directly in front of the crocodile.

The crocodile came to a halt, shocked. It stared in utter terror at the white-robed youth who had just appeared in front of him. It recognized this youth! Years ago, this youth had pursued him so tightly that he had nowhere else to flee but the Grove. However, back then the youth’s aura had been fairly weak; he had merely been an Elder God at that time. His aura was now much more powerful.

“He chased me through the Grove. Is he the one who wrecked it?” The crocodilian bugbeast was utterly terrified. Bugbeasts were sentient creatures and thus were capable of fear. Even in the Grove, it had merely been one of the weaker creatures present. How could it dare to battle against Ning now?

“Spare me, spare me!” As soon as Ning appeared before the creature, it

hurriedly called out for mercy.

Ning blinked. He wasn't in a hurry to attack. "It knows to ask for mercy at a time like this? Interesting."

This was the first time that Ning had encountered a bugbeast which begged for mercy.

"Hand over your treasures," Ning instructed. "If you hold back so much as a single item... don't blame me for not having given you a chance."

"Y-y-yes!" The crocodile's entire body transformed into a stream of gray mist, and one treasure after another began to fly out of that misty region. Dao weapons, strange claws, scales, a scroll, Chaos treasures... a small pile of treasures appeared next to it.

"Everything I have is right here. I didn't hold anything back." The crocodile reformed and hurriedly spoke to Ning in an ingratiating manner.

Ning's eyes lit up. The claws and those scales were the spoils of war the crocodilian creature had acquired from defeating other bugbeasts. Ning didn't really care about them. However, that scroll emanated an aura of sword-ki that was particularly striking, and the fact that it was resonating with his own Mirrorsnow Painting told Ning that it had to be the item he was looking for.

Ning waved his hand, pulling the scroll over towards himself. He opened up the scroll to take a look. It was the painting of a palace.

"Man, these paintings really are ugly," Ning muttered to himself, but he had a smile on his face. He put the painting away.

"Four paintings in each set. I now have the first and the third paintings in this set." Ning turned away and flew back towards the Grove of Monoliths. The crocodilian creature nervously watched as Ning left before it frantically turned to flee once more, its four stubby legs moving furiously as it once more transformed into a streak of mist.

Ning had slain most of the bugbeasts in the Grove of Monoliths, and quite a few of them were in possession of valuable treasures they had acquired as spoils of war. Ning naturally was planning to collect it all.

Six days later, Ning emerged from the Fog Sea and returned to the Ten Thousand Mountains.

“It is time to leave.” Ning turned back to glance at the fog, sighing mentally.

He still remembered quite clearly the scene of him entering Undermoon Lake for the first time. Back then, Ning had merely been an Empyrean God and had viewed World God Northrest as a figure of utterly overwhelming power. Now, Ning was at an even higher level of power than World God Northrest had ever reached. There were very, very few individuals below the Samsara Daolord level of power who were a match for Ning.

“But I’m still far from being strong enough to reverse the flow of spacetime and bring her back to life.” Ning shook his head, then walked out of the mountains.

.....

The outside world.

Clouds were drifting high up in the skies. The blood-robed Arroyo, the gold-robed Fukai, and World God Boneplate were silently seated atop the clouds, continuously scanning this entire chaosworld with their godsense. They had completely suppressed their auras, and they looked like three hungry wolves who were preparing to pounce upon their prey. For now, their claws and their fangs remained hidden as they continued to quietly wait.

They were waiting for Ji Ning to emerge!

Rumble...

Suddenly, there was a spatial ripple.

Arroyo, Fukai, and Boneplate simultaneously turned to look towards a direction off in the distance. Even though they were millions of kilometers away, they were capable of seeing with great clarity a white-robed youth who had a sword on his back materialize in the air above the Allgod Estate. It was that freak of an Elder God whom they had been awaiting for so long.

“Eh?” Ning could sense their godsense and so he spread his own godsense out as well. As he did so, he also turned to look in their direction, and he immediately saw those three distant figures seated in the lotus position above the clouds.

In that moment, their gazes intersected in midair!

# Chapter 10: Hellwind Golems

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

The three mighty World Gods flew through the air like three meteors, moving straight for Ji Ning at high speed. Although they were millions of kilometers away, they were able to arrive right next to Ning in a single breath's worth of time.

"Bold." Arroyo looked at Ning.

"You seem quite confident." Fukai's eyes were narrowed as he stared in a cold, weighing manner at Ning.

As for World God Boneplate, he quietly stood next to Arroyo.

Ning himself had reached the speed of a Samsara Daolord. Ning could tell at a glance that although these three were quite fast, he would be able to easily shake off any pursuit by them without even needing to use his Thunderlight Wings. Although the surrounding space had been locked down, preventing any teleportation, Ning's speed alone ensured that he could attack whenever he wished and leave whenever he wished. The initiative was with him.

Arroyo and Fukai never would've imagined that Ji Ning would vastly surpass them in speed as soon as he became a World God. For now, they were both filled with tremendous confidence.

"Hand over the Eternal blood," Arroyo said. "We're willing to trade treasures for it."

Fukai stared intently at Ning as well.

This was part of their agreed-upon plan. They wanted to first try and get Ji Ning to voluntarily hand over the Eternal blood. If they were able to acquire it by simply buying it from him instead of fighting for it, that would be ideal. They had many treasures and they didn't fear anyone below the Samsara Daolord level, but they weren't completely confident that they would be able to slay Ji Ning!

If Ji Ning completely focused on escaping... Arroyo and Fukai weren't

certain if they would be able to catch him and bar his path.

But of course... if Ji Ning was unwilling to hand the blood over, the only option would be to kill him!

“You are willing to use treasures to trade for the Eternal blood?” Ning swept them with his gaze. “And what do you have to offer?” Ning couldn’t even be bothered to deny he had the blood. No one here was an idiot, after all. They all knew the truth.

“We have treasures that are worth tens of thousands of cubes of chaos nectar. We’re willing to use it to trade for your Eternal blood. You should be satisfied by this price.” Fukai frowned.

“Ahahah... how generous!” Ning laughed.

“You are forcing us to fight.” The killing intent within Arroyo’s eyes began to strengthen. In the end, they were still just World-level cultivators. Although they had many treasures, for them to be able to produce tens of thousands of cubes worth was already quite impressive. What, were they supposed to hand over their Eternal weapons as well? Only a fool would be willing to hand over his trump card treasures.

“Cut the crap, you running dogs of the Aeonians.” Ning’s face turned cold as he snapped at them.

The faces of both Fukai and Arroyo tightened.

“You are the running dog of the Aeonians!” Arroyo immediately snapped back.

“What, we’re members of the Aeonians just because we want the Eternal blood?” Fukai laughed coldly. “Not even the formation-spirit of the Allgod Estate would dare to claim that we are Aeonians. You, however, are quite audacious. How dare you sully us with such wild rumors!”

Neither of them would admit it, not even if it cost them their lives.

True Aeonians were all at least at the Samsara Daolord level of power, and they had auras that were completely different from the auras of normal Samsara Daolords. They could be recognized at a glance. However,



the descendants and progeny of true Aeonians looked just like ordinary cultivators did. So long as they were not Awakened, there was no way to recognize them and there was nothing special about them.

Aeonians were mortal enemies of the Dao Alliance! Thus, any Aeonian slave who dared enter the territory of the Dao alliance would immediately be surrounded and attacked by all parties, once it was verified that they were indeed servants of the Aeonians. They were the common enemies of all cultivators!

As for Daolord Allgod, he absolutely detested the Aeonians. If the members of the Allgod Estate felt certain that Arroyo and Fukai were Aeonians, the Goldeye Golem and the other formation-spirits would've immediately attacked them and killed them. However, because there was no way to prove it, they had to follow the instructions left behind by Daolord Allgod prior to his death.

"The two of us were simply coerced by others to acquire this Eternal blood, that's all." Arroyo said coldly, "Hurry up and hand the Eternal blood over. Otherwise, today will be the day you die."

"Oh? Will it?" Light suddenly flashed from Ning's hands as sharp, icy sword swords suddenly appeared within them. This was a set of Dao weapons which Ning had acquired from the Grove of Monoliths, and it was one of the many Dao weapons he had plundered from that place.

This set of Dao weapons included six swords in total, each of which was a top-grade Dao weapon. They were incredibly sharp and perfectly suited for cultivators of the Dao of Water. These swords all seemed to be created from freezing cold ice, and thus Ning had decided to simply name them the 'Frostice Swords'.

Ning believed that the six Frostice Swords were most likely weapons that had belonged to World-level cultivators. Of the Dao weapons Ning had found within the Grove, these six swords were the treasures which Ning liked the most. Not just anyone would be worthy of forcing Ning to use his Eternal weapon, after all. On the other hand, Ning wasn't arrogant enough to try to fight Arroyo and Fukai barehanded either.

The faces of Arroyo and Fukai instantly turned cold and forbidding as well.

“Kill!” A fierce light flashed through Arroyo’s eyes as a total of eighteen golden golems appeared around him, each of which emanated with an aura of incredible power.

“Kill him!” Arroyo roared.

“Kill.”

“Kill.”

The eighteen golden golems suddenly transformed into a giant black-and-white tornado that moved incredibly fast as it charged towards Ning. The gigantic black-and-white tornado began to cause all sorts of strange phenomena in the surrounding area.

“There were actually eighteen of them?” Ning was rather startled, as Arroyo had merely used nine of the golems when he was fighting in the Samsara Grinders. Now, it appeared obvious that Arroyo had been limited by the rules of the trials back then. There were actually eighteen golems in total, nine of them Yang-aligned and nine of them Yin-aligned. When they joined together, they were able to cause tremendous disruptions to the surrounding fabric of space. In addition, each golem had the power of a master-class World God. Upon joining together into a formation, they were strengthened and would each have close to the power of a supreme World God.

When all eighteen of them fought together, they would be able to easily kill most supreme World Gods!

“Father bestowed this set of Hellwind Golems upon me. They are invincible against anyone below the Samsara Daolord level of power. Even though I’ve broken through to transcend past the supreme World God level of power, I’d still find it quite hard to battle these Hellwind Golems.” Arroyo was extremely confident in his golems.

“Careful!” Fukai suddenly shouted loudly.

“What?!” Arroyo turned pale.

Ning had manifested six arms and was wielding six of those Frostice Swords. He transformed into a white blur and was able to easily charge out of the encirclement of those eighteen golden golems, then charged straight towards Arroyo who was located the closest to him. In doing so, he clashed with two of the golems and actually knocked both of them flying backwards!

Ning's eyes were filled with an utterly terrifying sword-intent and killing intent.

Arroyo held those two enormous scimitars in his hands, a dark look on his face. "What marvelous sword-arts." He had to admit that in terms of intricacy, his saber-arts were inferior to Ji Ning's sword-arts. Still, it made sense. Swords were more nimble and agile weapons than sabers to begin with. Sabers were weapons that focused on dominance and raw power. They were two completely different weapons.

Arroyo was still completely confident in his saber-arts. Those saber-arts had allowed him to transcend past the supreme World God level of power, after all!

"Die." As Ning charged towards him, Arroyo suddenly chopped out with both of his enormous scimitars, unleashing two streaks of blade-light.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Two criss-crossing streaks of blood-red light appeared in the air, filled with auras of absolute dominance. They hacked straight towards Ning with an aura of simply terrifying power.

"Soleheart stance." A black hole suddenly appeared in the skies, and both of those two terrifying streaks of saber-light were drawn into the black hole, the power of the black hole completely dispersing the two attacks.

Ning was simply too strong now. His sword-arts were clearly inferior to his foe's saber-arts, and Ning was clearly using just Dao weapons while his foe was wielding a pair of Eternal weapons, but Ning had the benefit of possessing as much physical strength as ordinary Samsara Daolords did. This was what allowed Ning's Soleheart stance to take these two streaks of

saber-light head-on.

Whoosh! Ning borrowed momentum from the shockwave of the clashing attacks, shooting straight towards World God Boneplate who was standing quite close to Arroyo.

“Careful!” Arroyo’s face tightened.

Although Ji Ning was already quite freakishly strong as an Elder God, Arroyo truly had not imagined that Ning would become THIS powerful as soon as he became a World God. Just like that, the freak of an Elder God had become a transcendent World God as well? Alas, it seemed as though this newly ascended World God was indeed just as powerful as Arroyo himself.

In their original plans, World God Boneplate actually served a special purpose. However, given how powerful Ji Ning actually was, World God Boneplate was now of limited use in this battle. The problem was that everything had simply happened far too quickly. World God Boneplate simply didn’t have a chance to hide, and Ning’s own speed was far faster than Boneplate’s.

“No!” World God Boneplate was badly shocked as well.

Slash! Sword-light flashed as it pierced through the skies and pierced through Boneplate’s forehead. Ning yanked his sword downwards, causing World God Boneplate’s body to bisected into two halves. Despite that, Boneplate hadn’t died yet.

“Get over here.” A rope suddenly appeared out of nowhere and twisted itself around Boneplate.

Ning was actually quite surprised by what had just happened. He mused silently to himself, “He didn’t even have a suit of Dao armor? His protective divine ability was quite weak as well.” Ning actually hadn’t expect his strike to go straight through the man’s body. If the man had been wearing a suit of Dao armor or had learned a half-decent protective divine ability, not even someone as strong as Ning wouldn’t been able to slice through his body with such ease.

Alas, Arroyo had quite a few servant and Boneplate was one of the weaker ones. Thus, he wasn't given access to many decent treasures.

"Shit." A look of fury could be seen on Arroyo's face. Although Boneplate was originally one of his weaker slaves, right now he was his only remaining slave.

# Chapter 11: When He's Ill, Go For the Kill!

Arroyo was enraged, but Fukai was shocked.

Arroyo was quite powerful. When he exchanged blows against Ji Ning, the difference in power between the two wasn't that great. However, Fukai was merely a supreme World God and was much weaker by comparison. A shocked, angry look was now on Fukai's face. "How could this be happening? How could this freak of an Elder God be so powerful after breaking through to the World level? It appears as though even Arroyo is slightly inferior to him! Those eighteen Hellwind Golems aren't able to stop him at all."

"Come out." Fukai immediately produced his jade green globe.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh...

One tiny jade green globe after another began to fly out of the first one. As they flew out, they quickly increased in size and began to release enormous, powerful bugbeasts. These bugbeasts all had auras of tremendous might and had the power of master-class World Gods. More than fifty of the bugbeasts appeared in the blink of an eye.

Even Ning was rather surprised upon seeing this. "What a fellow!"

Arroyo was a tough cookie. Apparently Fukai was no pushover either! It must be understood that although the Grove of Monoliths had held over a hundred bugbeasts, the number that had truly reached the master class could be counted on one hand.

Now, over fifty such master-class World God bugbeasts had appeared before Ning. Even supreme World Gods would be forced to flee or perish before such an onslaught of bugbeasts. Most likely, even Arroyo would be put into a very tough situation.

"On one side, we have a eighteen golems that are part of a set. On the other side, we have over fifty bugbeasts that are master-class World Gods in power."

Ning suddenly grinned. "Excellent. What fine treasures for the picking."

Ning wasn't worried in the slightest.

"Kill him!"

Fukai pointed at Ning from afar and howled angrily, "Kill!"

"Kill."

The awe-inspiring army of bugbeasts charged towards Ning at the same time, their auras blasting outwards.

As for the eighteen Hellwind Golems, they surrounded Ning and furiously began to assault him once more. A look of delight appeared on Arroyo's face when he saw this. "Fukai finally pulled out his bugbeasts. When they work together alongside my golems, they should be more than strong enough to trap this freak."

Fukai's father was a member of the Aeonian Kingdom who specialized in rearing bugbeasts for them. Arroyo's father was also an Aeonian, but his skill lay in the art of golems.

Fukai and Arroyo were both considered Aeonian descendants. In fact, both were two of the most outstanding descendants of the Aeonian race.

It must be understood, however, that the price to forcibly Awaken any descendant of the Aeonian race was a staggering high one, so high that not even the Aeonian Kingdom could pay it with impunity. This was why they repeatedly sent their descendants to take on these danger-filled challenges!

Both sets parents would do everything they could to ensure that their progeny would win the chance to be Awakened, and thus they had each prepared special killer weapons as well.

Fukai's killer weapon was his horde of bugbeasts. Arroyo's killer weapon was his powerful formation of Hellwind Golems.

"That really is a lot of bugbeasts." A pair of wings suddenly appeared on Ning's back, flashing with electric light. It was the Thunderlight Wings! Ning's insights into the Dao of Lightning were now higher than before, with his insights into the Dao of the Sword having improved even more

dramatically. As soon as he activated his wings they allowed him to stab through the air like a sharp sword, moving much faster than before.

Swoosh!

Ning was already quite fast to begin with. Now, he was being assisted by the Thunderlight Wings! He left behind a beautiful, solitary streak of light in the skies as he easily evaded both the fifty-five bugbeasts as well as the nearby Hellwind Golems.

And then... he charged straight towards Fukai!

“What?!” Fukai’s face turned pale.

“How is he this fast?” The smile froze on Arroyo’s face as he saw this. Ji Ning was too fast, far faster than the two had imagined! It must be understood that although these bugbeasts had the power of master-class World Gods, they were quite lacking in terms of technique. They had incredibly powerful bodies, and a number of incredibly fast avian bugbeasts were amongst their ranks, but Ji Ning was even faster!

This was because Ning’s raw speed and strength were both comparable to that of newly ascended Samsara Daolords! This was a completely different level of power. Now that he had activated the Thunderlight Wings, the Hellwind Golems and the bugbeasts were only able to stare in a daze.

If they couldn’t keep up with him, there was nothing they could do to him!

“Careful, Fukai!” Arroyo sent frantically. Although they had started out as rivals, Ji Ning was simply too formidable a foe. If Fukai died, his bugbeasts would lose their master. In fact, it was entirely possible that both they and the jade green globe would fall into Ji Ning’s hands!

“Go!” Fukai willed it.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Three more bugbeasts appeared. These three bugbeasts were all incredibly muscular and covered with golden fur. Fukai then produced a



metallic plate that was covered with many golden runes. He poured his Immortal energy into this Dao-seal, activating it.

Rumble...

A globe of golden light that was thirty meters long suddenly appeared, covering Fukai within it.

“Stop him!” Fukai ordered his three bugbeasts, then turned tail and began to flee.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The three bugbeasts were almost instantly knocked flying as a streak of lightning snaked past them towards the fleeing Fukai.

Prior to this, Ning had actively dodged past the many bugbeasts and golems. However, since there were now just three bugbeasts Ning didn't even want to bother avoiding them. In fact, if he wanted to he could've quickly killed all three of them. As Ning saw it, however, if he could kill Fukai and seize the jade green globe then all of these bugbeasts would fall under his control.

“I'll be owning these bugbeasts shortly. I can't bear to kill them.” Ning was clearly filled with confidence.

“He's too fast.” Although Fukai was fleeing in terror towards Arroyo's direction, Ning was quickly able to catch up to him. Fukai turned his head to look back at Ning, a horrified look on his face.

“BREAK!”

A streak of sword-light came hammering down upon him.

The Allgod stance and the Horizon's End were attacks of equal power when Ning was using other weapons. Only when Ning used Violetjewel was there a significant difference in power between the two.

The Horizon's Edge technique focused on speed. As for the Allgod stance, it focused on explosive and furious power!

It was as though an enraged dreadwurm had appeared in the skies, slamming down with tremendous, earth-rending force towards the golden

globe of light around Fukai. The golden globe of light shuddered and turned slightly dimmer, but Fukai was able to borrow from the momentum of the strike to flee even more quickly.

“I wasn’t able to break through?” Ning frowned slightly when he saw this.

“What?! He was able to consume 20% of the power of my Dao-seal with just one blow?” Fukai shuddered in his heart. “My Dao-seal is capable of withstanding a full-strength blow from a Samsara Daolord, yet a newly ascended World God was actually able to destroy 20% of its energy with one strike.”

As Fukai was fleeing in terror, Arroyo was flying straight towards him. “Leave him to me. Use your bugbeasts to help me tie this freak down.”

“Alright.” Fukai understood that they had to work together in perfect unison if they wanted to kill this terrifying freak. Given how fast Ji Ning was, if he wanted to flee he would’ve fled long ago. Clearly, he felt absolute confident in his chances to win.

Ning watched as the many bugbeasts and golems surged towards him. As for Arroyo, he charged straight towards Ning with both giant scimitars held at the ready.

“That all you have?” Ning manifested [Three Heads, Six Arms], wielding a sword in each of his six arms.

“Kill!”

Every streak of sword-light that shot out was filled with terrifying levels of power and moved at incredible speed. Arroyo was immediately driven to the defensive. He did his best to block the attacks with his two scimitars, but he still forced into a rather ungainly position.

It must be understood that every single sword-strike Ning delivered was slightly stronger than Arroyo’s strikes. The thing was, Ning had six swords while Arroyo merely had two scimitars. As the saying goes, it is hard for two fists to defend against six hands! Arroyo found it extremely hard to defend against the attacks, and his saber-light continuously surrounded

him as he completely focused on defending against the oncoming streaks of sword-light. He wasn't able to fight back at all.

"Quick, quick, quick!" Arroyo frantically ordered his Hellwind Golems to hurry up.

"Move faster, Fukai!" Arroyo was yelling at Fukai as well.

He truly had begun to panic. As the saying went, if you focused exclusively on defense you would eventually lose. He felt as though he was walking on a tightrope, treading the fine line between life and death. Ning's swords were simply too fast, and Arroyo felt as though he might slip up and fail at any moment.

Slash!

Just before the Hellwind Golems and the bugbeasts arrived, Ning finally managed to land a streak of sword-light against Arroyo's waist. Arroyo instantly turned pale as he was knocked backwards by the force of that blow.

Boom! Boom! Boom! As the saying went, when he's ill, go for the kill!

When experts fought, victory or defeat could be determined by the slightest of things.

Ning already held the upper hand to begin with, and he was so fast that his foes wouldn't have any chance to recover from any mistakes. He sent out several furious sword-strikes on succession, each one landing directly against Arroyo. Arroyo was like a moth that had been swept into the raging waves of the sea, completely unable to resist whatsoever.

"N-n-no...!" Arroyo furiously did his best to fight back, but his two scimitars had been completely suppressed to the point that he wasn't even able to chop out with them. Just at this moment, a black serpent suddenly appeared.

Generally speaking in a duel of experts, when one person was at a disadvantage that person would immediately flee.

Alas...

Arroyo wasn't as fast as Ning. There was no way he would be able to escape.

The black rope quickly slithered forward like a viper, wrapping itself around Arroyo's body. It quickly bound Arroyo up tightly, causing a look of despair to appear on his face.

He was finished!

# Chapter 12: The Curtain Call

As the ropes tightened around Arroyo's body, he couldn't help but think back to his life within that cold, grim, ancient clan of his. His father had been a remote and exalted figure. All of his father's descendants had to work hard to cultivate and fight for everything they wanted! Arroyo himself had started off as just one of many weak descendants, but he had carved out a path all his own through the corpses of the others and eventually became a master-class World God. He became his father's most cherished child! But even in his dreams, Arroyo's truest desire was to become a real member of the Aeonian race.

"I lost." Arroyo stared forwards.

The white-robed youth was standing in the air in front of him, his main sword still slung over his back. The youth produced a small golden gourd. Whoosh! A powerful sucking force was applied to Arroyo's body, and he wasn't able to fight back against it at all due to the ropes that were binding him.

Swoosh! He was sucked straight into the gourd. Once he entered the gourd, the ropes automatically released him and flew back out.

"No. No! I can't accept this. I can't!" Arroyo stared at his surroundings. There were a pair of spinning maelstroms within this gourd, one of black energy and the other of golden energy. As soon as Arroyo appeared, both maelstroms instantly exploded with terrifying levels of power as both began to grind towards him.

Grind, grind, grind. The terrifying grinding power filled every inch of the entire gourd. There was no place to run or hide at all. Arroyo's only option was to rely on his divine power and his body to resist, but once his divine power ran dry he would be ground into dust.

"Right. I still have my Hellwind Golems." Arroyo could suddenly sense those eighteen ripples of power that were linked to him from outside the gourd. Those were his golems, all of which were completely loyal to him. He wasn't dead yet, which meant they were still in his service.

“Join forces with Fukai to kill that freak. Kill him!” Arroyo sent a mental order to his eighteen Hellwind Golems. “Kill him, seize his golden gourd, then release me.”

“Yes, Master.” The eighteen golems responded with complete devotion.

However, Arroyo himself knew that this was all just wishful thinking. From his battle against Ji Ning, he knew exactly how fast Ji Ning was. Would his eighteen Hellwind Golems really be able to succeed in killing that freak of a cultivator, even if they worked in harmony with all those bugbeasts?

Even if they were lucky enough to actually kill Ji Ning, Ji Ning’s corpse would probably fall into Fukai’s hands. It would be incredibly difficult for the eighteen Hellwind Golems to snatch Ji Ning’s corpse, find the gourd, then manage to release him. Still, in principle Arroyo still had a shot to stay alive. All he could do was try his best to seize it.

Golden gourd in hand, Ji Ning stared at the eighteen Hellwind Golems charging towards him. He actually felt quite relieved upon seeing this. “Thank goodness these golems didn’t self-destruct.”

As Ning saw it, these golems would soon be part of his property. For them to self-destruct would be a terrible waste.

During the first great war of the Three Realms, when the Lord of All Things had died his Envoys had all self-destructed. However, this was primarily because the Lord of All Things himself was very skilled in the art of constructs. He had personally created those Envoys and had naturally left behind certain self-destruct seals within them. By contrast, Ning had no way of causing any of the golems he had purchased during the treasure auction to self-destruct.

Arroyo had received these eighteen golems from his own father and similarly had no way to make them self-destruct. The creation of each golem required an enormous amount of blood, sweat, and precious materials. If one of them self-destructed, it would make all that work go to waste and render the golem useless. At most, it could be melted down to have its Five Elements essence extracted from it. Thus, golems that were

available for sale would rarely have self-destruct mechanisms built into them. Generally speaking, only golems that were created for personal use by their users would possibly have self-destruct mechanisms built into them.

“What should I do? What should I do?!” Fukai was completely stunned. “Arroyo was actually captured!”

“Should I flee?” Fukai wanted to run. “But if I can’t acquire the Eternal blood, I’ll still end up dying!” They had all sworn lifeblood oaths upon accepting this mission from the Aeonian Kingdom.

To flee was to die.

Then... the only answer was to fight!

“Those eighteen Hellwind Golems haven’t given up yet. Good.” Fukai’s eyes turned bloodshot as he pointed towards Ning and roared furiously, “Kill him! Kill him for me!”

“AROOOO!” “GWRAAAAAR!”

There was an awe-inspiring army of fifty-eight bugbeasts flying through the air, and they charged straight towards Ning alongside the eighteen Hellwind Golems. Alas, the Thunderlight Wings on Ning’s back simply flapped gently, allowing him to transform into an arced line that easily moved past the attacking golems and bugbeasts. When Fukai saw this, he was filled with despair... which only strengthened when Ning charged straight towards him.

“Shit. Come on then! You think you can kill me?” Fukai began to go berserk and flew straight towards his bugbeasts and the golems. If he could ensure that they were by his side, then Ning would have to go through them in order to get to him.

“Oh? Still struggling? It won’t work.” Ning frowned slightly as he suddenly reached back and placed his right hand upon the hilt of the sword he was carrying.

Clang. The Eternal weapon, Violetjewel, came out from its sheath!

Ning moved with incredible speed as he charged straight towards Fukai. However, a black-armored avian bugbeast was still able to intercept him midway.

Bang! Ning casually struck out with the palm of his left hand, almost as if he was swatting away a mosquito. His massive palm had been transformed to become roughly the same size as the bugbeast, and when it landed against the bugbeast's body it sent the bugbeast tumbling backwards.

"Let's do this!" When Fukai saw Ning pressing near, a look of delight appeared in his eyes as more and more bugbeasts and golems were gathering around him.

"This Dao-seal of mine is enough to block several of his full-force attacks. If he lands a hit on me, I'll borrow the momentum of the strike to flee far away from him, but he'll remain trapped and surrounded by all these bugbeasts and golems. He's such an idiot! How dare he actually charge straight inside?" Fukai was wildly excited upon seeing this.

Previously, Ning had relied on his speed in order to avoid the bugbeasts and golems. He had never actually engaged them in battle, and this was his first time actually putting himself 'at risk'. Fukai felt the first stirrings of hope.

Whoosh. Ning charged down from above.

Boom! His mighty body smashed into a golem, sending it stumbling backwards as Ning swept straight past it.

Finally, Ning struck out with his Eternal sword, Violetjewel. Violetjewel instantly transformed into an enormous streak of bloody light, carrying an aura of terrifying sharpness as it chopped straight towards Fukai.

"B-b-but..." Fukai's face suddenly turned pale. When Ning chopped downwards with that terrifying sword, the bloody, baleful aura emanating from it instantly pervaded Fukai's mind, causing even him to be filled with a feeling of uncontrollable fear.

This was different.



This was completely different from last time!

Last time, Ji Ning's sword had 'merely' been able to consume more than 20% of the energy of Fukai's Dao-seal. The stance looked the same, but the aura was far more powerful this time! Fukai's very true soul was shuddering in horror.

BOOM! The aura of golden light surrounding him trembled, then broke apart.

When the sword-light slammed against Fukai's body, Fukai couldn't help but vomit out a mouthful of blood. He stared ashen-faced at Ning, a look of despair in his eyes. "How is this possible? How could this have happened? My Dao-seal still had 80% of its power remaining. How could it have been shattered by one strike, with that strike still carrying enough excess power to wound me!? I have a Dao armor and a protective divine ability. Can it be that his sword is as powerful as the sword of a Samsara Daolord?"

A mocking look suddenly appeared in Fukai's eyes. "Kill! Kill! All bugbeasts, begin killing your peers. Wipe out all the other bugbeasts. Kill them!" Upon seeing that terrifying strike of Ning's, Fukai finally realized what was going on.

If even his Dao-seal had been incapable of resisting a full-force attack from this monster, this monster clearly wasn't someone he could possibly contend with. Most likely, Ji Ning would be able to dispatch the bugbeasts with a single blow each. Neither Fukai nor Arroyo were a match for him.

"Kill each other! Wipe each other out! You monster, the reason you didn't even kill a single bugbeast was because you wanted to take control over them, right? Haha, in your dreams!" Fukai had gone completely insane.

Arroyo was unable to destroy the golems under his control, and Fukai was similarly unable to cause his bugbeasts to commit suicide. Bugbeasts were living creatures, after all. One of the most overriding and basic of instincts for any living creature was to stay alive! However, what Fukai could do was to order them to fight amongst themselves. In fact, one of

the most common ways of rearing bugbeasts was to have weak bugbeasts fight amongst themselves and devour each other, allowing the final survivors to be incredibly strong.

Boom! Boom! Bang!

The fifty-eight bugbeasts gave up chasing after Ji Ning and began to fight amongst each other. Blood, limbs, scales, and fur flew everywhere as the bugbeasts began a wild civil war amongst themselves.

“Aww, shit.” Ning had originally been planning on drawing Fukai into his gourd and slowly ‘digesting’ him with it, but his face now sank as he changed his mind.

“Die, then.” Ning exploded forth with full power.

Violetjewel once more stabbed through the air, causing a terrifying streak of bloody light to descend. Every single blow which Ning now delivered was filled with his maximum power and was capable of destroying a fully-charged version of the Dao-seal which Fukai had just used up. There was no way Fukai could possibly withstand such a strike! Although he had Dao armor and a protective divine ability, his divine power would be quickly wrung dry by the power of these consecutive attacks.

A mere twelve blows later, Fukai was all out of divine power.

Bang! Upon the thirteenth sword-blow, Fukai’s body trembled a final time, then began to split apart and crumble as though he was made out of clay. His eyes, however, were fixed towards the skies. He could still faintly see the blood-colored streak of sword-light that had been left behind by the final blow.

“Such beautiful sword-light.” Fukai closed his eyes.

Fukai’s body completely crumbled apart and his truesoul dissipated along with it.

Arroyo and Fukai had sought to slay Ning in order to seize the divine blood of the Eternal. Alas, in the end Arroyo had been sucked into the gourd while Fukai had been slain on the spot.

# Chapter 13: The Three Realms

“Seven died.” Although Ji Ning had seized control over the jade green globe as fast as he could, more than seven of the bugbeasts had died during those brief moments of fratricide. Now, only fifty-one remained.

“Stop!” After binding the globe, Ning immediately exerted his control over the bugbeasts and ordered, “Surround those golems!”

“Yes.” “Yes.” ...

The bugbeasts immediately acknowledged the order obediently and began to swarm around the Hellwind Golems, giving them no place to run.

.....

Within the golden gourd.

Arroyo’s divine power was being depleted at an incredibly fast rate as the power of those two streams of energy continued to grind down at his body. His soul was linked to the Hellwind Golems outside and so he ‘saw’ everything that had happened.

“Those who kill others and take their treasures are destined to be killed in turn, one day.”

Arroyo emanated a bloody aura because his Dao was a Dao of slaughter. He had always been the winner in his battles, and so he had advanced step by step and left a trail of corpses behind his wake. However, this battle for the Eternal blood was the most important battle in his life. If he won, he would’ve become a true member of the Aeonians and skyrocketed in status in power. However... he had failed.

“Ahahaha... today, Fukai and I have fallen to your hands. However, how many cultivators shall truly gain eternity? One day, you will fall as well. You will die as well! Ahahaha...” Arroyo laughed wildly, and as he did so the last drops of his divine power were used up. His body was shattered apart, then ground into dust.

.....

Ning could sense the crazed death throes of Arroyo within the gourd, but he remained quite calm.

It was true. The path of cultivation was a very difficult one to tread, and only a few Samsara Daolords existed in the Endless Territories to begin with. Samsara Daolords treaded the line between life and death with each step they took. How few of them would be able to take the final step, achieving the Daomerge and gaining true eternity for themselves?

However, Ning was determined to continue moving forward on his path, motivated by a faint, dim hope that he would never release. He hoped that one day, he would gain the power to reverse the flows of spacetime and bring his wife back to his side. This was the only way he would ever be able to see her again.

“One thing at a time.”

The eighteen Hellwind Golems had lost their master. Ning had overwhelmingly superior power and thus was quickly able to forcibly bind them.

“Time to leave.” Ning’s own godsense was spread out to cover this entire chaosworld. The disturbance caused by his battle against Fukai and Arroyo was quite enormous. Although both sides had kept control over themselves and their power, the Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals stationed in this chaosworld were still so terrified that all of them had gone into hiding and were unwilling to come out.

Ning stepped forward and through the world-membrane, returning to the primordial chaos outside the world.

.....

Outside the Three Realms. Within the primordial chaos.

A black-robed Ji Ning was standing here within the primordial chaos, staring towards the Three Realms. Although his Primaltwin had stood guard over the Three Realms this entire time, his lifeblood oath made it so that he was completely unable to actually re-join the Three Realms. Only upon reaching Vastheaven Palace and completing the lifeblood oath

would Ning be able to return to the Three Realms.

Rumble...

After mastering the 'Sword World', Ning was now capable of seeing through the primordial chaos and into the Three Realms.

The many 'secrets' of the Three Realms were no longer secrets to Ning. Everything was laid bare before his eyes, including its structural underpinnings as well as its core. He could even see an illusory, formless river that flowed through everything within it. This was the River of Destiny.

In truth, all creatures within the Endless Territories had their own destinies, and these destinies were all joined together into a great Sea of Destiny. The Three Realms was just a single chaosworld and thus it had just a single River of Destiny. The countless Rivers of Destiny of the endless chaosworlds within the territories were like countless tiny streams that would join together to form the enormous Sea of Destiny.

"The River of Destiny..." Ning's gaze pierced through the Void and the primordial chaos alike as he stared at the River of Destiny. He could see the countless truesouls that had been submerged within it as well as the destinies of cultivators and mortals alike.

"Father! Mother!"

Ning's heart trembled.

He saw them. Deep within the River of Destiny, there was a pair of truesouls who clung tightly to each other. Those were the truesouls of his father Ji Yichuan and his mother Yuchi Snow. Even though they were dead and their truesouls had been swept into the River of Destiny, they remained by each other's sides.

"Father. Mother. Wait for me just a bit longer. Your son has already become a World God. Soon, I'll head out to Vastheaven Palace. Once I reach Vastheaven Palace and complete my lifeblood oath, I'll be able to re-enter the Three Realms and draw your truesouls out from the River of Destiny." Ning's heart was shaking.

It was clearly something that he could do with ease, with but the wave of a hand. Alas, he knew that if he truly stretched so much as a finger into the Three Realms, his true body and his Primaltwin would both be attacked and destroyed by the lifeblood oath he had sworn.

“I’ll wait a bit longer,” Ning murmured softly.

Whoosh.

A figure suddenly appeared off in the distance. It was a white-haired, white-bearded old man dressed in Daoist robes.

“Master.” Ning looked at him.

“Ji Ning.” Subhuti smiled. Just now, he had gone to Ning’s estate within the primordial chaos but had been unable to find Ning. He knew that his disciple had to have come to this place, as this was where his disciple would often go to stare at the Three Realms. Alas, he could see everything happening within it but couldn’t take so much as a single step within it.

“You-...” Subhuti’s face suddenly changed as he stared at Ning. He took a careful look, then a second, then a third.

“The World level?” Subhuti’s voice was quavering slightly.

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “I broke through.”

An excited look was now on Subhuti’s face. “That’s wonderful. I’ve been worrying about you ever since you started your journeys into the Endless Territories. Now that you have at least reached the World level, things will be much easier for you.”

“Mm.” Ning nodded.

“However, as the saying goes there’s always a taller mountain. Even though you have reached the World level, disciple, you must not be overconfident and brash. You don’t have many supporters or helpers in the Endless Territories. You’ll have to rely on yourself for everything. Those of us in the Three Realms won’t be of much aid either. You have to be careful,” Subhuti said. Although he didn’t know what Ning had experienced thus far, the Three Realms did know a bit about the Badlands

Territory and knew that it was a place of constant struggles and battles between cultivators.

For Ning to emerge unscathed and at an even higher level of power meant that he absolutely had to have experienced and survived many of those life-and-death battles.

“Don’t worry. Your disciple isn’t so foolish as to think himself invincible.” Ning laughed. “I’m still dreaming of one day meeting with Mother Nuwa, you know.”

“Have you heard any news of Mother Nuwa in the territories outside?” Subhuti immediately asked. All of the first-generation Fiendgods who were born from the primordial chaos were filled with tremendous respect and veneration towards Mother Nuwa. She had reached the World level back when she was in the Three Realms!

“I have not. I don’t have any news about her at all. In fact, there have been no new World Gods in the Badlands Territory who seem even remotely similar to her.” Ning shook his head.

“Ugh...” Subhuti shook his head as well.

“Oh, right. Master, I’d like to trouble you to help me with something. Please send word to the Three Realms right away that I am intending to transmit certain techniques, divine abilities, and secret arts to our fellow Daoists of the Three Realms.”

“Transmit?” Subhuti was surprised.

“Right. In the past, I wasn’t able to do so. Now that I’ve become a World God myself, things have changed,” Ning said. In recent years, he had killed quite a few enemies and seized their treasures, but it was rare for cultivators at this level to carry cultivation manuals on them. Everything was firmly imprinted into their minds. The only reason World God Northrest had left behind so many manuals was because he was planning to bring up a successor in the future.

Ning was now far more powerful than World God Northrest had been, but he simply hadn’t spent enough time cultivating and adventuring. The

number of transmittable techniques he had acquired during his adventures could be counted on one hand. Although he could purchase certain techniques from the Badlands Everworld, he still wouldn't be able to bring them back to the Three Realms right away. He'd have to first memorize and master them, then write them down again. This would take an extremely long period of time.

Ning had correctly predicted that by the time he finished, he would probably already have reached the World level. World God Northrest had already given Ning many techniques which he could transmit to others upon him becoming a World God himself. Now, Ning had full and free control over them.

"Good, good, good!" Subhuti said excitedly, "This is wonderful. With these powerful techniques by our side, the Three Realms might give birth to new World Gods and Chaos Immortals in the future."

"Right." Ning nodded.

Ning had the feeling that the Three Realms was not an ordinary place.

It was in the Three Realms that Daoist Three Purities found the incredibly valuable Nine Chaos Seals.

The Three Realms had also given birth to absolutely dazzling figures such as Nuwa and Houyi, all of whom had created their own techniques since there was no one present to teach and guide them.

"After I transmit these techniques to them, I need to go exploring the primordial chaos around the Three Realms and see if I can find the original Nine Chaos Seals," Ning mused. Many of his fellow disciples were actually incredibly talented; they simply had never gotten access to techniques that could guide them to becoming World-level cultivators.

The Three Realms was about to undergo a true golden age of cultivation and explode in power. Ning was very eager to see this happen. If he was the only person capable of protecting the Three Realms, what would happen to it if something happened to him? If the Three Realms had numerous experts on Ning's level within it, it would become a truly safe place for its denizens.



.....

A flying ship was sailing through the primordial chaos. Ning and the Flamefairy were both seated within the ship, staring out towards the primordial chaos.

“Master, were you waylaid by Fukai and Arroyo?” Su Youji immediately asked.

“I was.” Ning nodded.

“How did it go?” Su Youji asked. She didn’t know if Ning had fled on his own or if he had won that battle.

“I’m sitting right here before you. How do you think it went?” Ning smiled. “They lost. Both died on the battlefield.”

Su Youji wasn’t able to take part in that battle but had been quite worried. She knew that Fukai and Arroyo were both very powerful figures, especially Arroyo. He not only was a transcendent World God, he was also surrounded by a bloodthirsty aura that testified to his prowess in battle. Given the many treasures that they had... she couldn’t help but worry. Her life was bound to Ji Ning’s, after all. If Ji Ning died, she would be at the mercy of his killer.

“Where shall we go next?” Su Youji asked.

“Let us return to the Badlands Court first. Later, we’ll leave.” Ning stared at the outside world. His first priority was to return to the Badlands Court and get rid of the Eternal blood.

# Chapter 14: Sell It To Me

They flew aboard the boat towards a spacetime transfer array, eventually making their way back to the Badlands Everworld.

“There it is. The Badlands Court.”

Ji Ning and Su Youji were walking atop the waves as they advanced. Soon, they reached the island located in the center of the lake, the island which held the Badlands Court. In front of the island was a crimson-haired man dressed in loose robes who smiled at the two of them. “Brother Darknorth, congratulations for becoming a World-level cultivator. Oh, the Flamefairy broke through as well? It seems this recent trip has been tremendously beneficial to the two of you.”

“Brother Qichang, why are you here?” Ning was surprised.

“Master instructed me to stay here and wait for you.” The crimson-haired man laughed. “Come, I’ll take you to meet with Master.”

Ning was secretly amazed. Daolord Badlands truly lived up to his reputation for divination. Indeed, Ning was planning to ask him to help dispose of the Eternal blood. Somehow, the Daolord knew about it even before Ning asked to speak with him, thus choosing to send a disciple out to come greet him...

“Youji, you can go to the Water Curtain Home for now,” Ning instructed.

“Alright.” Su Youji departed obediently.

“Please lead the way, brother Qichang.” Ning and the crimson-haired man advanced side-by-side. The Badlands Court was laid out in a truly intricate way and filled with many formations. If no one was around to guide him, Ning truly wouldn’t have been able to locate Daolord Badlands’ residence.

The two quickly arrived at a quiet, secluded courtyard.

The courtyard was quite simple and unadorned. Daolord Badlands was relaxing in the lotus position, a single flask of wine on the table in front of him.

“Master, I’ve brought Darknorth as instructed,” the crimson-haired man said respectfully.

“You can leave now,” Daolord Badlands instructed.

The crimson-haired man acknowledged the order, then respectfully departed. Daolord Badlands turned his gaze towards Ning. A hint of a smile on his face, he pointed at the other seat and said, “Sit.”

“Thank you, Daolord.” Ning sat down in the lotus position before Daolord Badlands.

“You’ve reached the World level? Old brother Solesky will be quite happy to hear this.” Daolord Badlands laughed. “This morning, I could sense that something was going to happen. I did some careful Numerancy and divined that there is something that you wish me to help you with.”

“Yes.” Ning immediately nodded. “There is indeed something. This junior was fortunate enough to acquire a treasure within the Allgod Estate known as the ‘divine blood of the Eternal’.”

“The Eternal blood?” A shocked look appeared on Daolord Badlands’ face.

Although he was skilled in the art of Numerancy, he wasn’t all-knowing. Divining the future through Numerancy was actually quite difficult and there would be many things that were left unclear. Using Numerancy to divine the past was actually much easier, because it involved things that had already happened. Things in the future had obviously yet to happen, and thus almost anything was possible! Future Numerancy was generally only capable of calculating out some particularly major events.

Ji Ning was specifically coming to ask Daolord Badlands for help, and so Daolord Badlands had been able to sense it. Just a simple bit of Numerancy was enough to tell him that Ji Ning was coming to ask for his assistance. By then, Ji Ning had already reached the Badlands Everworld and was heading towards the Badlands Court, giving this bit of Numerancy an extremely highly credible interval.

“Is it the Eternal blood of Emperor Melobo?” Daolord Badlands asked.

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “I hear that the Aeonians would do anything to get their hands on this Eternal blood.”

“Of course they would!” Daolord Badlands’ eyes lit up as he smiled. “That drop of Eternal blood represents half of the life energy and vitality of Emperor Melobo. It took him forever to recover from that loss. That drop of Eternal blood is uncalculably valuable to them, and it’s something which will never appear on the open market. It is more valuable and alluring to the Aeonians than you could ever imagine.”

Ning said, “I heard the spirits of the Allgod Estate say the same, which is why I’m worrying about the proper way to dispose of this Eternal blood. That’s why I came to ask you for help.”

“Right. The simplest solution is to offer it to the Dao Alliance.” Daolord Badlands chuckled. “But I have another idea, if you are interested.”

“Pray tell, Daolord.” Ning looked at him.

“Sell your drop of Eternal blood to me,” Daolord Badlands said.

“Oh?” Ning was slightly startled.

“If you offer it to the Dao Alliance, they’ll probably give you two million cubes of chaos nectar as well as grant you immediate entrance into the alliance. If you sell it to me... although I won’t be able to bring you into the Dao Alliance, I’d be willing to give you three million cubes! What’s more, given how strong you are, you’ll definitely be granted entry into the Dao Alliance in the future.” Daolord Badlands continued, “If there are any techniques or treasures that you want, just tell me and we can deduct it from that balance.”

Daolord Badlands truly wished to take possession of that drop of Eternal blood.

The Dao Alliance itself wouldn’t have much use for it, but it was still an incredibly rare and valuable item! Whenever a drop of concentrated Eternal blood appeared in the Dao Alliance, it would immediately be purchased by its most powerful Samsara Daolords or Eternal Emperors. Someone like Daolord Badlands wouldn’t even have a chance! Once those

powerful Samsara Daolords acquired the blood, they would analyze it and research it to gain insights from it.

It must be understood that this drop of Eternal blood was the concentrated blood essence distilled from more than half the blood and flesh of a mighty Eternal Emperor of the Aeonian race. This had represented an enormous drop in Emperor Melobo's power. No Eternal Emperor would be willing to make such a sacrifice... and the number of Aeonian Emperor's could be counted on one hand to begin with!

Thus, the 'set' price of two million cubes which the Dao Alliance was willing to pay was an incredibly low price.

Daolord Badlands naturally grew desirous of this drop of blood...

Daolord Badlands was actually a dazzling talented Daolord as well. As the Goldeye Golem had put it, if he was able to reach the Verge of the Daomerge then he would become a terrifyingly powerful figure who would be as strong as Daolord Allgod had been.

Dazzling talents such as him naturally were filled with tremendous ambitions! In the past, he didn't have that much wealth; even if you placed that drop of Eternal blood in front of him, he wouldn't pay it much attention. But in order to get his assistance, Daolord Solesky had prepared a gift of tremendous value for him. Daolord Solesky was a Palace Lord of Vastheaven Palace and had been alive for an extremely long period of time, accumulating enormous amounts of wealth. He had offered roughly twenty million cubes of chaos nectar for Daolord Badlands' assistance!

Some of those treasures were meant for Daolord Badlands to rebuild his avatar.

As for the other treasures?

Daolord Badlands actually had numerous plans for them, but now that Ji Ning had brought a drop of Eternal blood to his doorstep, he suddenly changed his plans.

"Perhaps some of my children will be able to draw out the power of the Aeonians from within that drop," Daolord Badlands mused to himself.

“My divinations indicate that there is a better than 20% chance of them succeeding in this endeavor. First, Daolord Solesky came bearing fabulous gifts. Now, my young friend Ji Ning is asking me to help him deal with this Eternal blood. This is a karmic blessing which destiny has bestowed upon me. I have to seize it!”

“What do you think?” Daolord Badlands looked at Ning.

“I’m in no rush to join the Dao Alliance. All I want to do is get rid of this Eternal blood as soon as I can,” Ning said with a laugh. “Selling it to the Dao Alliance, selling it to you... it’s all the same to me.”

“Good.” Daolord Badlands laughed. “Three million cubes of chaos nectar. The average networth of most powerful Daolords is roughly in this range. My young friend Ji Ning, you must make sure not to waste this tremendous blessing. Tell me, which treasures, techniques, and divine abilities do you desire? I’ll help you find them and buy them. But of course, if all you want is chaos nectar then I can provide that as well!”

What would be the point of acquiring that much chaos nectar? Was he supposed to eat it like food? The best solution was for Ning to use it to help himself grow more powerful as soon as possible.

“I want to acquire the final part of a divine ability,” Ning said. “This divine ability is known as the [Golden Idol].”

“The protective divine ability, [Golden Idol]?” Daolord Badlands nodded. “That won’t be too hard. I can buy it for you from the Dao Alliance. Do you want it for yourself or do you wish to be able to teach it to others? If you wish to be able to teach it to others, the price will be dozens of times higher.”

“I’ll use it for myself.” Ning wasn’t going to waste his money like that.

“This divine ability is quite powerful. It can make your body as tough as a top-grade Dao weapon. Abilities on this level are fairly rare. I’ll help you buy it, but it’ll take two hundred thousand cubes of chaos nectar.”

Ning was secretly speechless. This was even more valuable than a Pseudo Samsara Pill!

If it cost that much just for him to train in, then wouldn't that mean a version he could transmit to others would cost several million cubes? No wonder that not even Vastheaven Palace had access to such a wonderful technique. Large clans and sects all had many expenses they had to pay. World God Northrest switched to training in the [Golden Idol] after acquiring it, but he had only gained access to the upper portion and the middle portion.

"Generally speaking, only Samsara Daolords need to have bodies that are as tough as top-grade Dao weapons," Daolord Badlands said. "Honestly, I don't know why you are in such a rush to buy it. Still, you now are worth more than three million cubes of chaos nectar. Buying it won't cause you much trouble."

Ning smiled. He might not be a Daolord, but he did have a body that was comparable to a Daolord's body!

"What else do you need?" Daolord Badlands asked.

"I've heard of an Eternal treasure known as the Elementum Waterflame Gourd," Ning said. "I wish to buy it."

"Right, right! That is indeed a good treasure. It is fairly cheap, but extremely useful for World-level experts." Daolord Badlands immediately nodded. "This gourd will require roughly half a million cubes."

The Elementum Waterflame Gourd...

It held both Firecloud Lightning as well as Watersmoke Lightning within it. Both were considered types of Dao-level lightning! These were two of the nine types of Dao lightning which Ning would need in order to train in the secret art of lightning known as [Novessence Thunder] technique. By buying this item, Ning would be able to use these two types of lightning for now as well as use them to train in the [Novessence Thunder] later. Two birds with one stone!

Dao lightning was extremely expensive because capturing it was incredibly difficult. A single type of Dao lightning would generally be worth a minimum of two hundred thousand cubes of chaos nectar. Firecloud Lightning and Watersmoke Lightning were two fairly common

types of Dao lightning. There were certain rare types of Dao lightning that simply couldn't be found on the market at all. Even Daolord Allgod had only found nine types of lightning that were suitable for his usage!



# Chapter 15: Violetjewel's Background

Ji Ning had long ago decided that he was going to train in the [Novessence Thunder] secret art. Alas, while he was in the Allgod Estate he didn't even have access to nine types of chaos lightning, and so he was in no rush to start learning the technique just yet. After mastering nine types of chaos lightning, he would then test out mastering the nine types of Dao lightning with this technique.

However, according to the secret art's descriptions, only World-level cultivators could train in chaos lightning while only Samsara Daolords could train in Dao lightning. Thus, for now Ning simply purchased two of the relevant types of Dao lightning. In all honesty, he probably couldn't afford purchasing all nine types; even Daolord Allgod was only able to get nine!

"The lower portion of the [Golden Idol] and the Elementum Waterflame Gourd. That's not even a million cubes." Daolord Badlands looked at Ning. "Need any other treasures?"

"The Mirrorsnow Paintings. I need the second and the fourth paintings. Would I be able to buy these two?" Ning asked.

Daolord Badlands glanced at Ning, then chuckled. "It seems this trip to the Allgod Estate truly was a lucky one for you. The Mirrorsnow Paintings hold the legacy of Emperor Mirrorsnow within them. Although he had released a total of forty of these paintings into the Endless Territories, there's simply far too many cultivators. How about this? I'll ask the Dao Alliance and see if anyone is willing to sell those two paintings. However, I can't guarantee they'll be available."

"If we can get it, let's give it a shot." Ning didn't try to force it.

"Anything else?" Daolord Badlands asked.

"Daolord, please take a look at this." Ning drew Violetjewel from its sheath on his back. Given that the two were discussing a business deal worth three million cubes of chaos nectar, a single Eternal weapon truly didn't mean much. Some Eternal weapons were worth as little as ten

thousand cubes, while valuable ones were still generally worth just a few hundred thousand cubes. Eternal weapons worth over a million cubes were very rare.

“This sword has been by my side for an extended period of time. Its previous owner was big brother Northrest, who named it ‘Violetjewel’.” Ning continued, “I wish to understand where it came from and want to see if I can get five more matching sets of this Eternal sword.”

Just so. Since he had three million cubes of chaos nectar to use up, Ning wanted to ensure that he’d be able to wield six Eternal weapons in any future battles! This would allow his attack power to increase dramatically, and he’d feel confident in battling even an enemy Daolord.

This was all because Ning’s [Nameless] sword-art was a technique that allowed for an airtight defense. If Ning used all six swords to focus on defense, then so long as the opponent wasn’t overwhelmingly more powerful Ning would still be able to survive.

“Oh? Violetjewel?” Daolord Badlands accepted the sword, then gently stroked its blade. As he did so, Ning released his control over the sword-intent hidden within Violetjewel’s quintessence core, letting its savage, bloodthirsty aura surge outwards.

“Just so. It truly is Violetjewel.” Daolord Badlands nodded.

“It ‘truly is?’” Ning was puzzled.

“This would be considered a middle-grade Eternal weapon.” Daolord Badlands laughed. “Once you become a Daolord of the First Step, you’ll be able to unleash the full power of this Eternal weapon. For now, it’ll be more than enough for you to wield while you remain within the World level.”

Ning nodded. In truth, low-grade, middle-grade, high-grade, and top-grade Eternal weapons were all the same to Ning. If the sword-intent contained within an Eternal weapon’s quintessence core was too powerful, Ning wouldn’t be able to make much use of it. Just as Daolord Badlands said, Ning would probably only be able to fully unleash the power of Violetjewel when he became a Daolord of the First Step.

Even if Ning was given a top-grade Eternal sword, he wouldn't be able to unleash much of its power for now.

"You said that this sword's previous owner called it 'Violetjewel'. This wasn't a name he chose at random," Daolord Badlands said. "This is the name given to the sword by the Eternal Emperor who forged it."

"It was forged by an Eternal Emperor?" Ning was quite curious.

"Long, long ago, that Eternal Emperor was an Emperor of the Dao Alliance! However, he ended up choosing to venture into the Endless Dark long ago. His name was Emperor Violetmount. Before he left the Endless Territories and entered the Endless Dark, he spent an extremely long period of time to create a total of ninety-nine middle-grade Eternal weapons which he named Violetjewel, nine top-grade Eternal weapons which he named Bloodpeak, and a terrifying weapon infused with all of his insights into the Dao of the Sword which he named the 'Violetmount Sword'."

Ning was speechless upon hearing this. Ninety-nine Violetjewel swords? Nine Bloodpeak swords? A Violetmount sword?

This was all done by Emperor Violetmount?

"So you wish to procure five more Violetjewels?" Daolord Badlands asked.

"Yes, I would ideally like to buy five of them." Ning nodded.

Daolord Badlands nodded. "Although Emperor Violetmount originally created ninety-nine of them, some of them ended up being lost over the course of many years. Others are currently being used by other cultivators. Thus, buying five will be quite difficult. Still, I'll ask the Dao Alliance to help out. Their power is spread throughout the entire Endless Territories; they just might be able to locate a few of these swords."

Daolord Badlands looked at Ning. "I have to warn you in advance, this situation is completely different from the situation we saw in the treasure auction. Treasures in that auction all start at a very low reserve price, and even the final price for each item won't be particularly high. Since you are

actively seeking out these specific items, they will definitely cost you much more.”

Ning understood this quite well. The treasure auctions were all fairly cheap; buying treasures at the normal ‘listed’ price in the outside world would generally cost significantly more! As for someone like Ning who was actively looking for very specific items, the price would definitely be even higher.

“How high would it be?” Ning asked.

“A single Violetjewel sword generally goes for just a hundred thousand cubes or so. However, since you are actively seeking out this specific sword it’ll probably take a hundred and fifty thousand, maybe even two hundred thousand,” Daolord Badlands said.

“Any price below two hundred thousand is acceptable,” Ning said. He was no fool. If the price was too high, it really wouldn’t be worth it.

It must be understood that middle-grade Eternal weapons would generally go for anywhere from thirty thousand to sixty thousand cubes of chaos nectar in the treasure auctions. The normal list price, however, would be around a hundred thousand cubes.

Since Ning was actively seeking out these specific swords, the price could rise to as much as two hundred thousand cubes. In all honesty, this was quite a high price. Two hundred thousand cubes would be enough to easily buy a high-grade Eternal weapon during a treasure auction. If you were lucky, you might even be able to snag a cheap top-grade Eternal weapon!

“Anything else?” Daolord Badlands asked.

“Oh, that’s plenty. I don’t need anything else for now,” Ning said.

“Good. How about this? Give me a bit of time, roughly half a year or so, and I’ll give you a million cubes of chaos nectar for you to use it as you see fit,” Daolord Badlands said. “As for the treasures you are seeking, since I’ll need to ask the Dao Alliance to help out it’ll probably take a good deal longer. If we are lucky, it might take just four or five years. If we are

unlucky, it might take a few decades. If there are any leftover cubes of chaos nectar, I'll hand that over to you as well."

"Thank you, Daolord," Ning said.

There were two reasons Ning had chosen to ask Daolord Badlands for help. The first was that Daolord Badlands was on extremely good terms with Daolord Solesky. The second was that the formation-spirits of the Allgod Estate had suggested that Ning go seek him out. Daolord Badlands was a dazzlingly talented figure who had an extremely resolute Dao-heart. Even if he lost all of his treasures, he wouldn't throw away his own principles or his own path.

Daolord Badlands was extremely skilled in divination, which meant that it was actually quite rare for him to go out adventuring. His style of cultivation was quite different from that of most other Samsara Daolords. This was why he didn't have that much treasure. In truth, it was all thanks to Daolord Solesky's gift of twenty million cubes worth of treasure that he had become so wealthy.

Even so, he didn't have much actual chaos nectar. What he had was a large collection of random treasures and materials, which was why he told Ning he would need half a year for the first million cubes of chaos nectar.

Whoosh.

Ning walked back to the Water Curtain Home, his heart filled with emotions. "Eternal weapons are considered incomparably valuable to World-level cultivators, but they are nothing special to Samsara Daolords. I never would've thought that there would be ninety-nine copies of Violetjewel."

"Once I get those treasures, I'll be much more powerful than I am right now." Ning always felt as though he should do his best to convert his chaos nectar into treasures as soon as possible. Even if he eventually outgrew them in the future, he could still convert them back into chaos nectar by selling them.

"Master." Su Youji had returned to the Water Curtain Home earlier. She now came running out towards Ning.

“Youji, today we shall rest. Tomorrow, we are going to Waveshift City,” Ning said.

“Waveshift City?” Su Youji immediately asked, “Why are we going there?”

“You broke through to the World level. We need to find you some suitable treasures!” Ning laughed. “Spend some time picking what you like once we get there.”

“Alright.” Su Youji’s eyes lit up as she nodded repeatedly. Generally speaking, the master was responsible for outfitting his retainers with treasures. Still, most masters were quite stingy.

Ning, however, wasn’t stingy. And yet, he simply wouldn’t be able to afford giving Su Youji a set of Eternal weapons! Su Youji was a Chaos Immortal, and Chaos Immortals generally relied on sets of many powerful weapons. If every weapon in a set was an Eternal weapon, the cost of the set would be utterly astronomical.

“Waveshift City.” Another reason why Ning was heading to Waveshift City was because he needed to buy those nine types of chaos lightning. That way, he’d be able to start with the [Novessence Thunder] secret art.

The very next day, Ning and Su Youji set off for Waveshift City and went on a huge shopping spree. Fukai and Arroyo had both left behind quite a bit of chaos nectar and many treasures, giving Ning quite a bit of spare cash. Soon, the two had purchased everything they wanted, including the nine types of chaos lightning which Ning had been searching for.

# Chapter 16: Novessence Thunder

Within the estate-world.

Ji Ning was seated in the lotus position atop the sandy beaches of an oceanic island. Next to him was a black gourd and four other gourds. The black gourd was the Pentabolt Gourd while the other four gourds were ordinary gourds that each held a different type of chaos lightning.

“The five types of chaos lightning within the Pentabolt Gourd are five types that I can use. I have all nine types of chaos lightning and am ready to start.” Ning began to mentally prepare the [Novessence Thunder] secret art.

Ning began to activate his Immortal energy, sending it into one of the gourds. This gourd was filled with a streak of black lightning that radiated an aura of both insidious coldness and extraordinary ruthlessness.

Ning’s Immortal energy was guided by the [Novessence Thunder] technique to form a very unique web of energy that began to envelop the chaos lightning. Chaos lightning generally wasn’t capable of defeating even weak World-level cultivators; they were only capable of dominating cultivators below that level! Given how pure Ning’s Immortal energy was thanks to his body being formed by the merging of seventeen clones, he was able to easily seize control over that streak of chaos lightning.

“Come here.” The web of Immortal energy completely surrounded that streak of insidious black lightning. No matter how much it struggled or how it flared its power, the web of Immortal energy merely expanded and contracted alongside it. The web was extremely tough and tenacious, giving the black lightning no place to run at all.

“Long ago, I risked my life and lost multiple clones in order to tame the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent... but now, compared to this technique of Daolord Allgod’s, that technique was unfathomably weak and meaningless.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh. Daolord Allgod’s technique was like an incredibly wise fisherman, with the lightning being his fish; no matter how the lightning struggled or writhed, it was completely unable to

escape the control of the technique.

However, merely seizing control over the lightning was just the simplest starting point for this secret art.

Whoosh.

The web of Immortal energy squeezed around the streak of black lightning as it dragged it into Ning's body. Soon, it was pulled into the realm of chaos which now existed inside of Ning.

The Jindan chaos region was a blurry, hazy region. At its very center stood a luxuriously flourishing Dao-tree which stood more than sixty thousand meters tall.

"Essence of lightning... take form!" Immortal energy began to ripple through the chaos 'mud' that existed in a corner of this chaos region, taking shape and transforming into an enormous formation. A streak of black lightning thundered down angrily upon the formation. Boom! The formation was instantly filled with Immortal energy that fed hungrily upon the power of the black lightning.

Rumble...

Countless streaks of black lightning began to flicker throughout the rune-patterns that covered the entire massive formation.

"One of the lightning essences has been contained, for now at least." Ning nodded to himself. Establishing an essence of lightning was actually quite simple; the hardest part would be actually merging them to manifest the [Novessence Thunder] secret art. He would have to merge all nine types of chaos lightning in a manner similar to merging many ingredients into the production of a pill. Only then would the complicated secret art become usable. This would be thousands of times more difficult than simply forming the lightning essence was!

Ning himself was secretly nervous about this. Would he be able to succeed? Daolord Allgod was a master of alchemy and artificing, a truly peerless expert in these areas. Ning, however, wasn't skilled in either regard.



“Next.” Ning once again reached out, seizing control over another one of the eight types of chaos lightning after another. His vast Jindan chaos region quickly became filled with eight more types of lightning essence.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The nine types of lightning essence crackled and clashed against each other, each holding different types of lightning.

“The easiest part is done. Next comes the hard part, where I actually forge the [Novessence Thunder] secret art. Let’s see if I can do this.” Ning felt a sense of pressure, even though this was a secret art ‘merely’ formed by chaos lightning; it would be much simpler than doing the same with Dao lightning.

Using nine types of Dao lightning to form the secret art would be much more complicated. Still, Ning understood that even ‘merely’ using nine types of chaos lightning would be incredibly hard for the vast majority of World-level cultivators.

“Begin.”

Ning’s pure Immortal energy poured into the nine types of lightning essence. The process of converting the chaos lightning into lightning essence had already caused the explosive, raging power of the lightning to be tamed by the formation. This method was far superior to the technique Ning had used to tame the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent long ago.

Crackle. Hiss. Pop. The nine streaks of lightning began to fly into the air under the control of Ning’s Immortal energy. They wrapped around each other, intertwining like the limbs of lovers and beginning to join together...

BOOM!

The nine types of lightning suddenly broke apart and dispersed.

“I failed.” Ning shook his head. “According to the instructions, I have to be able to merge all nine types of lightning into one in order to form the seed of this secret art. Afterwards, with the passage of time, I’ll be able to use the nine types of chaos lightning through this seed in unleashing this secret art.” Ning felt a headache coming. “Although I’ve tamed all nine

streaks of lightning, I still need to perfectly match them together in a specific format that requires tens of thousands of steps. The lightning is simply too explosive and violent. The slightest mistake will result in failure.”

Ning’s Immortal energy was sufficiently pure, and his control over his energy was sufficiently strong. Given that his soul was being reinforced by the azureflower mist energy, it was similarly strong enough for him to maintain incredible control over the lightning. And yet, he still failed in the end. This was precisely because Daolord Allgod’s secret art was simply too detailed and complicated.

“I’ll try it again.”

Ning tried again and again to form the seed to this secret art. If he could succeed just once, the seed would be permanently formed and he wouldn’t need to spend all this energy and effort in the future. He’d be able to simply use this seed to activate the secret art!

Alas... it truly was difficult! Ning tried more than a hundred times, failing each time. Even his powerful soul was beginning to feel exhausted by the process. There was one time where he very nearly succeeded, but he ended up failing at one of the final steps.

“I’m going to rest for a while,” Ning mumbled to himself. “Simply merging nine types of chaos lightning is already incredibly difficult. How hard will it be for me to merge Dao lightning?”

“Hey...” Just as Ning was about to take a break, he suddenly noticed something within his body. “The azureflower mist energy can convert Immortal energy, divine power, and heartforce.” Ning mused to himself, “Although there’s no way for it to leave my body, it can easily enter the Jindan chaos region inside of me. If Immortal energy can be used to control the lightning, can the azureflower mist energy be used to do the same?”

The azureflower mist energy was far stronger than the Immortal energy!

“I’ll give it a try.” Ning immediately felt a hint of eagerness. Previously, he had dispersed his azureflower mist energy and sent it throughout his

body, with a little residing within the Jindan chaos region as well. Now, Ning sent more and more of the azureflower mist energy into the Jindan chaos region, where it began to fly straight towards the nine types of lightning essence that crackled at the margins of the region.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

The nine types of azureflower mist energy were like nine roving dragons that burrowed straight into the nine types of lightning essence. Upon the energy entering the lightning essence, Ning was ready to give controlling them a shot.

Instantly, the nine types of chaos lightning began to fly upwards. It was extremely easy, and the chaos lightning flew about in an extremely obedient manner.

“Haha, it actually works. Using the azureflower mist energy to control the lightning is a hundred times easier than using my Immortal energy.” Ning was delighted. If previously it had been as difficult as an ordinary man wielding a gigantic greataxe, Ning now felt like he was an ordinary man who was wielding a pair of chopsticks. It was so easy!

The nine streaks of lightning coiled around in the air, mixing together in a perfect manner and transforming to become something else.

Slowly...

The nine streaks of lightning merged into eight streaks, then seven...

In the end, only one streak of lightning was left. It was a streak of crimson-gold lightning that radiated an aura of power that was so great that Ning trembled in fear. It vastly surpassed any other type of chaos lightning in power, and Ning felt certain that most likely even Dao lightning wouldn't be much stronger than it.

Boom!

The crimson-gold lightning suddenly slammed downwards, smashing against the 'mud' of the formation. Instantly, the formation drew in the power of the crimson-gold lightning. It seemed to come to life as an enormous seal took form atop it.

“The seed of the secret art has taken shape.” Ning let out a sigh of relief.

In the future, the nine types of lightning essence would simply release their power and allow it to be converted by the seed, giving birth to that terrifying crimson-gold lightning.

“The [Novessence Thunder] formed by chaos lightning should be able to kill any master-class World God with a single blast.” After getting a good sense for how powerful the crimson-gold lightning was, he felt even more convinced of Daolord Allgod’s might.

However, given how strong Ning currently was, the [Novessence Thunder] would primarily be used as a ‘domain’ type effect, causing a large amount of lightning to surround and trap his foes. It must be understood that a domain that was capable of easily slaying master-class World Gods would serve as a terrifyingly strong constraint upon others!

When two individuals were on the same general level of power, for one side to be constrained in some manner would have a huge impact on a battle between them.

Daolord Allgod himself had used his nine secret arts at the same time to trap and constrain his foes. As a result, even someone like Emperor Melobo had been forced to flee. Emperor Melobo had damn near died, and in the end he had lost an enormous amount of flesh and blood which Daolord Allgod had refined into that drop of Eternal blood.

Ning was now in a superb mood after having successfully forged the [Novessence Thunder].

Two short months later, Daolord Badlands returned with a million cubes of chaos nectar. Although Ning had mentally prepared himself to receive such a vast fortune, his heart still shook when it actually entered his hands. For such a sum of chaos nectar to actually be before him was still quite a stunning sight.

For most Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals, a mere hundred bottles was already an incredible fortune.

For World-level cultivators, a hundred cubes was a shocking sum.

A million cubes was enough to cause even Samsara Daolords turn green-eyed with envy.

“I really have never seen so much of it before.” Ning was located within a miniature estate-world which held a small pond within it. Ning stared at this elegant-looking small pond, which was merely thirty meters in size. It really was quite small... but Ning’s eyes couldn’t help but shine as he stared at it. This entire pool was formed from chaos nectar!

# Chapter 17: The Trial of the Painting

After feeling stunned for a while, Ji Ning regained his normal composure. In the end, outside sources of power were extraneous. The path of cultivation was a path where one would have to rely on one's self.

"Time to go test out the Mirrorsnow Paintings," Ning murmured to himself.

The Mirrorsnow Paintings could only be entered once one reached the World level, and only World-level cultivators were granted entry; Samsara Daolords were unable to go inside.

"I wonder what sort of trials Emperor Mirrorsnow left behind? Time to take a look." More than two months had passed since he had returned from the Badlands Court. It had only taken him a single day to form the [Novessence Thunder] technique. The rest of his time had been spent ruminating over the Dao of the Sword. Ning had gained quite a few insights since his battle against Arroyo.

Ning had acquired the first Mirrorsnow Painting from the crocodilian bugbeast in the Grove of Monoliths within the Allgod Estate.

Ning was now seated by the sandy shores of that oceanic island, admiring the first painting. The painting was of a beautifully decorated palace, but the artistic quality of it really was rather low.

"In I go." Ning had bound the first Mirrorsnow Painting long ago. He now filled it with his Immortal energy, and his World-level energy instantly connected to the estate-world located within it.

Swoosh!

Ning entered the world of the painting.

"Eh?" Ning looked at his surroundings. Moments ago, he had been atop a sandy beach. Now, he was located within a towering palace that was carved out of jade. Its pillars glowed with golden light and were filled with carvings of strange beasts.

In front of Ning, far off into the distance up the stairs, there was a

golden throne. A figure suddenly appeared before the golden throne. It was a tall, golden-robed man who sat down atop the throne, staring downwards towards Ning like an emperor staring at his subject.

“After so many years, a new World-level cultivator has finally entered.” The golden-robed emperor said, “Junior, the Eternal Emperor ordered me to wait here for you. All you need to do is defeat me. If you can defeat me, you’ll have passed the trial of this estate-world. The four Mirrorsnow Paintings hold a total of four estate-worlds within them. If you can pass all four trials, you shall become a true, personal disciple of the Eternal Emperor.”

“Defeat you?” Ning looked at the golden-robed emperor. “Might I ask, what techniques am I permitted to use in this attempt?”

“You are not permitted to use Immortal energy or divine power. You must rely on nothing more than your own raw physical strength, and I’ll use the same amount of strength as you. The two of us shall compete in swordplay and nothing but swordplay. Neither of us shall use divine abilities, secret arts, or anything else,” the golden-robed emperor said. “If you can defeat me, you will have won.”

Ning now understood. This was a test of his sword-arts. The four paintings represented four major challenges. Daolord Windsource’s disciple had access to the third painting for an extremely long period of time, but he still remained unable to pass its trial. This was a testament to how difficult the trial would be.

“Come, then.” A Frostice sword appeared within Ning’s hands.

“Very well.” The golden-robed emperor rose to his feet, a broad golden longsword appearing in his hands as well. He slowly walked down the stairs, his aura growing in power as he did so. It was as though he was the one and only sovereign of this world, as though everything had to prostrate before him.

Ning’s face tightened slightly. What a terrifying sword-art! The man had yet to strike, but the sword-intent radiating from him had already caused Ning to feel a sense of danger.

“Great Firmament stance!”

Ning made his move. The Frostice sword in his hand struck out, causing the entire palace to become submerged within an endless mist of sword-light which blanketed everything. Although the Great Firmament stance was the third stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, it represented an entire Sword World. As Ning’s sword-arts and cultivation continued to improve, his Sword World would naturally become increasingly powerful as well.

The seemingly endless Sword World was like a vast net that completely encompassed the golden-robed emperor.

HUAAAANG!

The sound of a sword ‘roaring’ suddenly filled the entire palace as a golden streak of sword-light tore apart that endless Sword World. It was like the rising of the dawn sun casting its first glow of light upon the world, and it completely shattered Ning’s sword-arts apart.

Ji Ning was just barely able to use his own sword to block this attack, but he was knocked flying backwards by the force of the collision. Boom! He struck directly against the closed gate beneath him, causing a loud bang to be heard.

“What a dominating sword-art!” Ning was truly stunned.

This was a sword-art that was every bit as dominating as Arroyo’s saber-arts had been! The reason why Ning had been able to so easily defeat Arroyo was primarily because he was being reinforced by the azureflower mist energy. If it hadn’t been for his overwhelming advantage in speed and strength, and if he had to rely on just his sword-arts, there was no way he would’ve been able to defeat Arroyo’s saber-arts in such a way.

“CHOP!” The golden-robed emperor took another step forward, once more striking out with that towering, majestic broadsword. His sword-light flashed brilliantly, and it seemed as though nothing could stop this strike.

Whoosh. The Frostice sword in Ning’s hands suddenly transformed into a black hole, seeking to ablate the power of the enemy’s strike and then



defeat it. However, Ning could sense that his opponent's sword was so dominating and forceful that there was no way he could shake it at all. Instead, it was his own Soleheart stance which was broken. Once more, Ning was sent flying back by the force of the collision.

He was getting absolutely mauled in this fight.

The truth of the matter was, in terms of raw sword-arts Ning wasn't quite at the level of master-class World Gods. Even though he did have the [Nameless] sword-art and the [Quintessence Sword-Intent], he was just barely on the same level as the Starlord of Fogstone. He was far from being a match for this trial which Emperor Mirrorsnow had left behind.

Only a truly dazzlingly talented figure would be qualified to become the personal disciple of Emperor Mirrorsnow.

The golden-robed emperor within the first estate-world had incredibly profound sword-arts. Most likely, even Arroyo's saber-arts were slightly less mature in comparison. Arroyo had died shortly after making his breakthrough upon the Samsara Grinders, after all; he didn't really have enough time to stabilize and build upon his gains. This golden-robed emperor's sword-arts were finely perfected and absolutely flawless. They truly had reached a level of immaculate perfection.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" Ning emerged from the first estate-world, a look of delight on his face.

During this last battle, he had been sent flying into the walls, stone pillars, gates, and staircase more than sixty times. However, Ning felt nothing but pure joy. He had spent three thousand years meditating in the Hall of Sword, but he was in bad need of actual combat experience! No matter how much time you spent in meditation and training, if you didn't have any actual combat experience you would always have flaws in your technique.

In the world of the Mirrorsnow Painting, Ning was given an opponent who had essentially reached the apex of World-level sword-arts. This battle had given Ning a clear picture of the many flaws which existed in his sword-arts.

“Even if I’m unable to become Emperor Mirrorsnow’s disciple, the mere fact that I now have an incredible expert in the Dao of the Sword who will spar against me whenever I wish is of incalculable value.” Of course Ning was delighted!

“Let me take a look at the third estate-world.” Ning pulled out the painting that he had acquired from the Windsource Ruins.

Ning entered the world of the painting. He found himself in a world with a beautiful mountain, a waterfall which seemed to descend from the heavens themselves, and beautiful creeks that swirled next to him.

Ning immediately saw the gray-robed fisherman located off in the distance. The fisherman simply sat there fishing.

“Finally, a new World-level cultivator.” The fisherman rose to his feet in a leisurely way, then said calmly, “I have been waiting here on the orders of the Eternal Emperor. You are not permitted to use Immortal energy, divine power, divine abilities, or secret arts. I will use the same amount of strength as you possess in a swordplay competition.”

“Understood.” Ning nodded.

“Then come.” The fisherman’s fishing rod suddenly shrank to become merely three feet long, and he pointed it straight at Ning.

.....

Ning was utterly trampled and demolished.

The fisherman within the third estate-world was incredible. His sword-arts were like the clouds in the sky, completely unpredictable in their movements and transformations. The power of his sword-arts seemed to be utterly inexhaustible as well as he sent out one strike after another. Ning was confident in his defensive abilities, but in the end he was simply unable to defend against the fisherman’s attacks. He ended up getting whacked in the face quite a few times by that fishing rod, and was smashed into the ground each time.

Although the golden-robed emperor’s sword had knocked Ning flying backwards, Ning was still able to use his sword to block against those

attacks.

The fisherman's sword... Ning was actually unable to withstand it!

Ning knew that the fisherman and the golden-robed emperor each used different types of sword-arts, but were more or less on par with each other. The golden-robed emperor's sword-arts were more regal, upright, and just, and his attacks were filled with enormous power. The fisherman's sword-arts, by contrast, were more mysterious and unpredictable.

"Nice, nice, nice! Only by battling many experts who use the sword in different ways will I get a better picture of the flaws that exist in my own sword-arts." Ning was actually ecstatic at the beating he had just taken.

From this day forth, Ning became even more obsessed with meditating on his sword-arts. He battled against these two experts of the sword repeatedly, discovering many weaknesses in his own sword-arts and finding many areas for improvement.

The many insights into the Dao of the Sword which Ning had gained in the Hall of Swords were now finally transforming into true power. His sword-arts continuously improved with each sparring session, becoming more and more powerful.

Meditation and actual combat – the two went hand in hand. Both were necessary.

In the blink of an eye, more than ten years passed here in the Badlands Court. World God Dragonbinder had returned from the Allgod Estate as well, and the first thing he did upon returning was to go speak to Ji Ning.

"Brother Ji Ning, when I sensed the chaos energy fluctuating within the Allgod Estate I simply knew it had to be you making your breakthrough." When World God Dragonbinder saw Ning, he felt absolutely delighted.

The two spent some time dining and chatting together. Ning had gained many things from this trip to the Allgod Estate, but so too had World God Dragonbinder. In fact, he now had a vague idea as to what his path through Samsara would be. Alas, it was still nothing more than a vague idea. To actually tread that path and become a Samsara Daolord would be

very, very difficult.

Still, it was definitely an improvement. If he couldn't even see or sense his path, how could he have any hope of walking it?

Six more years went back.

Sixteen years after Ning's return to the Badlands Court, a Samsara Daolord came to pay a visit to the Badlands Court.

# Chapter 18: Leaving the Badlands Territory

The Badlands Court. Flower petals could be seen everywhere, drifting to and fro.

Daolord Badlands and his wife were seated opposite a cyclopean man with a single horn on his head.

“I didn’t expect that you would be assigned to personally escort this mission, big brother Fusu.” Daolord Badlands smiled as he spoke.

“I was planning to visit the Triclopean Thundersea anyhow, which was why the Dao Alliance asked me to help escort these treasures.” Daolord Fusu smiled. “The treasures you requested included the [Golden Idol] divine ability, a few Eternal weapons that are merely middle-grade, and the Mirrorsnow Painting. I imagine you must be purchasing them for one of your disciples, yes? You know, you really should make them go out and seek their fortunes. No matter how much you favor a disciple, you can’t spoil him to this extent.”

“Big brother Fusu, you think too highly of me. How could I possibly be willing to spend this much money just to help one disciple?” Daolord Badlands shook his head. “You’ll have to forgive me for not being at liberty to disclose the reason why I have requested these items.”

“Oh...” Daolord Fusu dropped this line of conversation. He let out a laugh. “Oh, right. I heard that old man Solesky of Vastheaven Palace has begun to furiously scour the realms for important treasures. He’ll be planning to start his Daomerge soon. I heard that he’s actually come to your Badlands Territory. He probably went to Waveshift world, right?”

“Yes.” Daolord Badlands nodded. This was no secret. Many Samsara Daolords had already guessed at the truth, and a little bit of divination would be enough to show that this very likely the case.

“That old fellow is finally willing to start his Daomerge.” Daolord Fusu let out a sigh. “Still, it makes sense. Their Vastheaven Palace has just given birth to a new Samsara Daolord, and Daolord Warlord has reached the fourth step as well. Even if old man Solesky fails his Daomerge, he’ll still

be able to protect Vastheaven Palace for a period of time before he perishes and his Dao vanishes. Vastheaven Palace will be able to grow considerably more powerful during this timeframe.”

Daolord Badlands nodded slowly. When one failed in the Daomerge, one’s truesoul would slowly begin to dissipate. However, given how formidable Daolords who were at the Verge of the Daomerge generally were, it would generally take an extremely long period of time for the truesoul to actually crumble away. It must be understood that even World God Northrest was able to endure for nearly a full chaos cycle before he truly died from the crumbling of his truesoul. Those ancient powers who were at the Verge would be able to last much longer.

But of course, if they went crazy and started attacking everyone around them, they would die much more quickly. Still... Daolords who had failed their Daomerge were destined to die, which make them incredibly fearsome foes to face. Some would engage in wild massacres and do things which they normally wouldn’t have dared to do, for whatever reason. Who would dare to antagonize madmen like them?

“I envy him. I wonder how long it will be before I, too, can set my burdens aside and go to my Daomerge?” Daolord Fusu sighed. “My entire race’s prosperity rests upon my shoulders. Although my race does have another Samsara Daolord, he’s still at the first step despite an entire chaos cycle having gone by since his ascension. He still hasn’t been able to reach the second step. I fear that his potential is limited and that he won’t have the power to protect our race.”

“Big brother Fusu, perhaps you will make a sudden breakthrough that will allow you to naturally and easily succeed in your Daomerge. When that happens, you will gain eternity,” Daolord Badlands said.

“Gain eternity? The number of Eternal Emperors in the entire Dao Alliance can be counted on two hands.” Daolord Fusu shook his head. “Enough of that. Let me give you the treasures which I escorted here. The price the Dao Alliance requested was a total of 1.81 million cubes of chaos nectar.”

“1.81 million cubes?” Daolord Badlands nodded. Chaos nectar instantly began to flow out of his estate-world, automatically separating themselves into a total of 1.81 million cubes before flying towards Daolord Fusu.

.....

Daolord Fusu left that very day as he headed off to the Triclopean Thundersea.

.....

Late that night, Daolord Badlands paid a personal visit to the Water Curtain Home to visit Ji Ning.

“Daolord.” Ning was shocked. “Daolord, if there’s anything you need, all you had to do was have someone send word to me.”

“I’ve pretty much finished the process of finding those treasures you sought,” Daolord Badlands said. “I have the [Golden Idol], an Elementum Waterflame Gourd, and five Violetjewels. The Mirrorsnow Paintings were a bit harder to find, as very few are willing to sell them once acquired. I was only able to buy a copy of the second painting for you.”

“That’s more than enough!” Ning said hurriedly.

Ning had predicted early on that most Violetjewels had probably fallen into the hands of Samsara Daolords. To them, being able to sell a middle-grade Eternal weapon for nearly two hundred thousand cubes of chaos nectar was an absolutely wonderful bargain. They would easily be able to purchase another powerful sword as well as other treasures they needed. Ning wasn’t surprised at all that they had been able to find the five copies that he needed.

Alas, the Mirrorsnow Painting was different. It was generally in the hands of World-level cultivators, and to those cultivators the paintings represented a priceless opportunity. Very few would be willing to sell off an opportunity to become a personal disciple of an Eternal Emperor. In fact, the Dao Alliance wasn’t even sure as to who was in possession of most of the paintings, as most World-level cultivators would keep their ownership secret.

“If we just round it off, the total cost is roughly 1.8 million cubes,” Daolord Badlands said. “I already gave you a million cubes previously. Let me give you another two hundred thousand cubes now, as well as these treasures.”

As Daolord Badlands spoke, he handed Ning a smooth disc of jade that held an estate-world within it.

“Thank you, senior.” Ning was very grateful.

The [Golden Idol] had cost two hundred thousand cubes while the Elementum Waterflame Gourd had cost five hundred thousand cubes. Daolord Badlands had been very clear about the price of these items, and so the total cost was around seven hundred thousand cubes.

In other words, the Mirrorsnow Painting and the five Violetjewels cost a total of 1.1 million cubes. Ning was actually quite happy with this price. Honestly, even if Daolord Badlands upped the cost a little bit, Ning wouldn't have been able to find out.

Within a private study. The six Violetjewels were all placed atop a desk, and they each emanated absolutely identical auras of sharpness and bloodlust.

“Six Violetjewels.” Ning nodded slightly. They would be of enormous use to him and make him stronger. “With these six swords, I'll be several times more powerful than I currently am. I should be able to give a decent fight to a Samsara Daolord of the First Step. Even if I can't beat them, I should still be strong enough to escape.”

When Ning had battled against the fisherman in the third estate-world of the Mirrorsnow Painting, he had eventually been unable to defend against the fisherman's rod.

However, Ning knew that one of the main reasons for this was that he had only been using a single sword. If he had six swords... it could be said that he could defend against even sixteen swords, preventing them from landing attacks upon him.

With just a single sword, Ning had been able to create an almost airtight



defense. With six swords working in unison, it would be as though he was surrounded and protected by enormous bucklers. Given Ning's absolute control over the Soleheart stance, he would have no flaws in his defenses at all.

"The Elementum Waterflame Gourd." A gourd suddenly appeared out of nowhere in front of Ning. This was a red-black gourd which saw black lines intertwining and mixing together with red lines on the surface of the gourd, making it look mysterious and beautiful.

After Ning bound the treasure, he was immediately able to sense the explosive, terrifying power of the Dao lightning within it. The two types of Dao lightning within the gourd were the Watersmoke Lightning and the Firecloud Lightning. Both were filled with absolute savagery, and it made sense. All lightning was explosive and aggressive by nature, making them incredibly difficult to control."

"It really will be thousands of times more difficult to refine them than the chaos lightning." Ning couldn't help but sigh to himself.

"Let me take a look at the lower portion of the [Golden Idol]." Ning picked up a jade slip then sent his divine power into it. He could immediately sense the lifeblood oath covering the technique, as well as the various rules and regulations which the Dao Alliance had set down. Ning carefully read through everything. Once he decided there were no problems, he immediately swore the oath.

Instantly, the information regarding the lower portion of the [Golden Idol] began to fill Ning's mind...

.....

Three days later.

"You are going to leave?" Daolord Badlands looked at Ning, who had come to pay respects to him.

"This junior needs to return to Vastheaven Palace," Ning said. "I regret having disturbed you so often in recent days, Daolord. This junior will definitely remember all the assistance you provided."

“Mm. Sooner or later, you do indeed have to return to Vastheaven Palace. However, to go from my Badlands Territory to the Vastheaven Territory is an extremely long journey, and you will encounter quite a few dangers and ancient powers on the way. It is difficult for me to divine exactly what you shall encounter on this journey.” Daolord Badlands shook his head. “Just remember one thing: caution above all else.”

“This junior understands.” Ning nodded.

Vastheaven Palace was very, very far away from the Badlands Territory, and the journey was quite a perilous one. Even World-level cultivators would find such a sojourn to be filled with dangers. Still, Ning felt confident that he wasn't too much weaker than most Samsara Daolords of the First Step, which meant that he should at least be strong enough to keep himself safe and survive the trip.

“Go, then.” Daolord Badlands nodded.

Ning departed.

A reflective look was in Daolord Badlands eyes as he stared at Ning's back as Ning left. “According to what Dragonbinder said, when Ji Ning was an Elder God he was capable of matching master-class World Gods in power. He can be considered a freakishly talented figure. Still... the path of cultivation is a path filled with countless dangers. I wonder how far he will make it on his path.”

Freakishly talented? That didn't count for much. Daolord Badlands himself was a freakishly talented figure, and over the course of many chaos cycles he had seen quite a few other freakishly talented figures as well. However, the vast majority of them ended up dying on their path.

If Ji Ning was his own disciple he probably would've been willing to pay almost any price, up to and including suffering severe injuries, in order to carefully divine what would happen to Ning on this journey. However, Ji Ning was just a disciple of Vastheaven Palace. There was naturally no reason for Daolord Badlands to act in such a selfless manner.

.....

The spacetime transfer array of the Badlands Everworld.

“First, we’ll go to the Azuresky Territory.” Ning led Su Youji into the transfer array.

“These two are requesting for the array to be activated just for them?” The Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals responsible for protecting the array were all secretly speechless. The distance from here to the Azuresky Territory was incredibly vast. The cost of activating the array just for the two of them wouldn’t be a mere hundred bottles; it would be a full cube of chaos nectar!

Still, Ning truly didn’t care about the cost. Going from the Badlands Territory to the Vastheaven Territory would at most cost him roughly a thousand cubes of chaos nectar! There were also many places where there were no connecting spacetime transfer arrays. He would have to personally fly to the closest array, often through many dangerous regions.

“The Badlands Territory...” Su Youji stared towards the outside of the array. “So I, Su Youji, am actually going to have a chance to see and explore other territories.” Being powerful enough to voyage through other territories was a testament to her strength.

“The Badlands Territory!” Ning stared at the skies far above them. This was the place where he had gotten his first start after departing from the Three Realms.

Rumble...

Spacetime began to twist and distort.

The entire array began to shine with blinding light as it tore through the fabric of space and time, teleporting the two of them to a distant place in the spacetime continuum. When the light faded away, the two figures had vanished from within the array.

# Chapter 19: Trifount Planet

More than ninety-two years went by in the blink of an eye.

The Qianyun Territory was a place that was incredibly far away from the Badlands Territory. Trifount was one of the planets located within this territory, and it was one of the core planets that were part of a local spacetime transfer array. The spacetime transfer array was gleaming with light as it twisted and distorted spacetime. Moments later, two figures suddenly appeared within it.

The first figure was a white-robed youth who was carrying a sword on his back. The second was a fiery-robed woman. The two were Ji Ning and Su Youji, who had travelled here all the way from the Badlands Territory.

“Trifount.” Ning and Su Youji both emerged from the formation and stared off into the distance.

Rumble...

A massive geyser of water could be seen off in the distance, blasting a fountain of water thirty thousand meters into the air. The stars glittered in the skies above them, causing the water to sparkle with rainbow light. This planet was constructed in a strange way, resulting in three enormous geysers that blasted mountain-sized fountains of water high up into the air. This was the reason why the planet was known as Trifount.

“We finally reached Trifount.” Su Youji had a rather solemn look on her face. “Master, our next destination will be the most dangerous place in our journey; the Sea of Darkness.”

“Yes. Once we pass the Sea of Darkness, we won’t be too far away from Vastheaven Palace.” Ning nodded as well.

Ninety-two years...

Ning and Su Youji had travelled through many different territories, some of which they had to fly through or teleport their way through! This was why it had taken them so long. They had encountered a number of dangerous situations along the way, including some deadly environments

as well as cultivators who had sought to waylay and kill them. However, none of these situations had truly been troublesome for the two of them.

They dared to ambush Ji Ning? They truly had been courting death.

“The most dangerous part of the journey from the Badlands Territory to the Vastheaven Territory is the passage through the Sea of Darkness.” Ning and Su Youji were standing alongside each other atop a tall mountain, staring off towards the distant void of space. Ning said, “Given how fast we travel... I expect it will take us eight centuries to go through the entire Sea of Darkness!”

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Suddenly, three streaks of light flew towards them from afar. They soon arrived before Ning and Su Youji, the streaks of light transforming into three cultivators who emanated auras of tremendous power. There were two men and one woman, but all three had World-level auras.

“Fellow Daoists.” The leader of the three, a fairly muscular man, walked over with a smile on his face. “Have you come to Trifount for the sake of passing through the Sea of Darkness?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded, not denying it.

The muscular man smiled. “My name is Xiang Lu. He is World God Windgrace while she is Chaos Immortal Waterswell.” The handsome, violet-robed man next to him nodded towards Ning and Su Youji. “Windgrace greets you, fellow Daoists.”

“Waterswell greets you, fellow Daoists.” The female Chaos Immortal was just as attractive as Windgrace, and her aura was even more charming than Su Youji’s.

Su Youji could be described as flickering flame, filled with alluring magnetism. This Chaos Immortal named Waterswell, however, was like a pool of gentle, soft water.

“I am Darknorth. She is the Flamefairy.” Ning introduced their side as well.

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth. Fellow Daoist Flamefairy.” The muscular man said, “We saw you two appear within the spacetime transfer array from afar. When we noticed how you two decided to stay here, we had a suspicion that you might be planning to travel through the Sea of Darkness. I imagine both of you know exactly how dangerous the Sea of Darkness is, and the journey is an extremely long one as well. Given how long and how dangerous the journey is, for a small group of just four or five World-level cultivators to try to pass through it by themselves is an extremely risky and difficult endeavor.”

Ning and Su Youji both nodded. It was true. It would indeed be very dangerous! There were many dangers on the path from the Badlands Territory to the Vastheaven Territory, but the Sea of Darkness was the most dangerous place of them all! Even someone as powerful as Ji Ning wouldn't dare to claim 100% confidence in navigating the place successfully.”

“That is why those of us who wish to traverse the Sea of Darkness will generally join together into a group before venturing forth.” The muscular man laughed. “Our current plan is to wait until we have a total of ninety-nine World-level fellow Daoists, so that we can join together into a formation if necessary. Once we have enough people, we will head into the Sea of Darkness. We already have more than eighty fellow Daoists, and the three of us have come to ask the two of you to join us.”

“Ninety-nine?” Ning and Su Youji exchanged glances.

“Don't worry. When we have enough people, all of us will swear a simple lifeblood oath that we are absolutely not permitted to attack any of our fellow travelers,” the muscular man said. “With ninety-nine of us working together, we will have a better than 90% chance of traversing the Sea of Darkness.”

Ning agreed with this assessment. Ninety-nine! Given how many World-level cultivators would be gathered here, some would most likely be supreme World Gods.

Once they all joined together into a formation and were able to support

each other, those supreme World Gods would be comparable to Arroyo in strength! The others wouldn't be too weak either. Once they all fought together, it was likely that even Samsara Daolords of the First Step would have to stay away from them.

"Fine." Ning nodded and smiled. "Just now, the two of us were worrying about how we were going to safely traverse the Sea of Darkness. It would indeed be much safer for us if we can work together alongside so many fellow Daoists."

"Immortal Waterswell, please lead these two fellow Daoists to the others," the muscular man instructed. He then looked at Ning. "Brother Windgrace and I will have to stay here and keep an eye out for any other World-level cultivators who we can invite to join us. Sorry for being unable to send you off personally."

"No need." Ning and Su Youji followed Chaos Immortal Waterswell and flew off into the distance.

"Our many fellow Daoists are all located close to this place." After flying for just a short period of time, they reached a flat grassland. There were quite a few World-level cultivators here clustered into small groups of two or three people. A total of eighty-three cultivators were located on this plains.

"The two of you can rest here for now. We'll head out once we reach a total of ninety-nine cultivators. I'm going to go back now and wait alongside big brother Xiang Lu."

Although quite a few World-level cultivators had been gathered here, only twenty or thirty percent of them belonged to the Qianyun Territory. The others were all from nearby territories, with very few being from places as far away as the Badlands Territory.

Most of the people here didn't know each other, nor did they need to know each other. After passing through the Sea of Darkness, they would all go their separate ways. Thus, they all stayed clustered in small groups of two or three, not really fraternizing with the others.

"Let's just wait, then." Ning and Su Youji sat down in the lotus position,

waiting silently while drinking some Immortal nectar.

While waiting, Ning continuously sent out a small amount of his divine power to create incarnations which he sent into the Mirrorsnow Painting. He repeatedly challenged the expert swordsmen within the three estate-worlds using his incarnations.

The golden-robed emperor. The fisherman. The assassin.

When dueling, these three would use the exact same amount of power as Ning. It was merely a contest of swordplay, and so Ning could simply use incarnations of divine power to carry out the sparring.

As for Ning's true body? Ning spent his attention on training in the [Golden Idol]. Initially, Ning immediately used three hundred cubes worth of chaos gems to upgrade his body to the Dao weapon level. After that, he began to simply train slowly in the technique, using just a small amount of chaos gems as he did so.

To upgrade his body and make it comparable to top-grade Dao weapons would require an extremely long period of time. Ning was in no rush. It was fine to take it slow.

Fortunately, they only had to wait eleven years at Trifount before the total number of World-level cultivators reached ninety-nine.

"My fellow Daoists." World God Xiang Lu smiled as he looked at the ninety-plus cultivators on the plains. "We've already gathered a total of ninety-nine World-level cultivators. It is time for us to head off into the Sea of the Darkness. Here are the formation-discs. Each cultivator can simply bind a single formation-disc."

A total of ninety-eight discs of light appeared before him, then flew towards the other World-level cultivators.

"This is an extremely simple formation. You'll know once you take a look at it." World God Xiang Lu smiled.

Ning accepted a formation disc. After sending his power into it, he quickly understood that this was indeed a very simple formation. It merged all the energy of the cultivators into one mass, making it so that



all the cultivators were reinforcing and supporting each other. They would all be much more powerful as a result.

There were actually many formations that were more powerful than this one, but none of the World-level cultivators here really knew each other or trusted each other. It was precisely because this formation was so simple that everyone had no suspicions regarding it and were willing to use it.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

As the cultivators bound the formation-discs, streams of light began to surge into the skies. The ninety-nine streams of light connected with each other, and all of the cultivators were blessed with the strength and power of the formation.

“I swear on my very life itself...”

“I swear on my very life itself...”

“I swear on my very life itself...”

The ninety-nine World-level cultivators simultaneously sent their Immortal energies into the oathstone they were surrounding. As they all swore the lifeblood oaths, they could sense the oaths of the others taking effect as well.

All of the oaths were identical. So long as they were in the Sea of Darkness, they were absolutely not permitted to launch attacks against their comrades. If the oath was violated, the assaulted party wouldn't even need to fight back; the lifeblood oath itself would ensure that the violator's truesoul was destroyed.

Once the oaths were sworn, the cultivators all grew noticeably friendlier towards each other. There was now at least an element of trust amongst them.

“My name is Poisonfeather. This flying vessel of mine is a top-grade Dao treasure that is specialized for long-distance flying. It should be quite

suitable for traversing through the Sea of Darkness.” A bald, silver-eyed man suddenly spoke out. “We can ride it together! If anyone has any better flying treasures, we can use that instead.” 1

Soon, the cultivators all decided to use Daoist Poisonfeather’s ship for their journey through the Sea of Darkness.

“Let’s head out!”

The ninety-nine cultivators all boarded the ship, keeping the formation active as they departed from Trifount and headed off towards the Sea of Darkness.

# Chapter 20: The Sea of Darkness

The flying vessel was three thousand meters long, completely black, and was shaped like a weaver's shuttle. It continuously advanced through the dark void of space towards the vast sea before them.

If Ji Ning wished to reach Vastheaven Palace, he absolutely had to pass through the Sea of Darkness! If he went around it, it would result in an incredibly long detour. What's more, the map which Daolord Solesky had given Ning didn't even specify the details to any such detour, instead simply telling him to go straight through the sea. This was because this was actually the safest option; the other options were even more dangerous!

Although this was safer by comparison, it was still a rather dangerous trip for World-level cultivators. If they weren't careful, they would easily die in this place.

This was one of the reasons why very few World-level cultivators would embark on such long journeys! When Ning had been in the Badlands Territory, he had queried the Starlord of Fogstone regarding the location of Vastheaven Palace, but neither the Starlord nor his subordinates had even heard of it. This was because the distance between the two territories was utterly enormous. Even the Badlands Court, the most powerful organization within the Badlands Territory, only held a few cultivators who were aware of Vastheaven Palace.

"We'll reach the Sea of Darkness soon," Ning sent mentally. "I recommend you go into the golem now. Don't stray too far from my side."

"I know my own limits, Master." Su Youji was quite excited. "The legendary Sea of Darkness. Actually, I've never even heard of it before this! To think that I'm going to be going into it just a short while from now. Wow. This trip from the Badlands Territory to the Vastheaven Territory will give me something to brag about for many, many years to come."

Ning chuckled, then closed his eyes and focused on attuning to the sword-intent of his Violetjewels.

He was attuned to its sword-intent at all times as he continuously meditated on the Dao of the Sword.

Whoosh.

The flying vessel continuously teleported through the emptiness of space. Roughly a day later, they finally arrived at the borders of the Sea of Darkness.

The entire vessel was completely silent as all ninety-nine cultivators stared at the distant sea of spatial chaos. Even here, at the mere borders of the sea, they could sense the spatial waves crashing against their flying vessel.

“Everyone.” World God Xiang Lu spoke out. The other cultivators turned their gazes from the Sea to him.

“According to what fellow Daoist Poisonfeather said, although this vessel is fast, it’ll still take over six hundred years to go through the Sea of Darkness. During these six hundred years, we’ll be in a state of constant danger. Thus, if anything happens I would like to ask that the more powerful experts among us to hold back. Please help out our weaker fellow Daoists. Once one of us dies, the formation will be dramatically weakened as well. The more of us die, the weaker the formation will be, making it even more difficult for us to safely traverse the Sea of Darkness,” World God Xiang Lu said.

“Naturally.”

“Since we are all on the same ship, we should all support and help each other.”

“Fellow Daoists, I hope all of us will be able to make it safely through this Sea of Darkness.”

The cultivators aboard the vessel were all quite nervous. This was the Sea of Darkness, after all. Most likely, few to none of them would dare to traverse this place all by themselves.

As for Ning, he watched quite calmly from his little corner. His original plan had been to venture into the Sea of Darkness alongside Su Youji, but

that would have indeed been rather dangerous. Now that ninety-nine World-level cultivators had joined forces, if nothing went awry they would stand at least a ninety-plus percent chance of successfully traversing the Sea. If you factored in Ning's true level of power, it could be said that they were virtually guaranteed to succeed.

Boom!

The pitch-black vessel flew forward at high speed, smashing straight into the Sea of Darkness. It continuously sped up as it flew forward, quickly breaking past the limits of the Heavenly Daos and continuing to skyrocket in speed. Soon, it reached a level of speed that was roughly double the speed of light. This was the vessel's limit, and it began to cruise forward at this speed.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Dark, turbulent waves of distorted chaos and space repeatedly crashed the sides of the vessel.

As for the ninety-nine cultivators, they all stared intently at their surroundings. Even Ning elected to draw Violetjewel from its sheath on his back.

"What a nervous feeling." Su Youji stared at her surroundings as well.

The World Gods and Chaos Immortals present were all extraordinary figures with extraordinary vision. Take Ji Ning, for instance. Even when he merely relied on his eyes, his current visual acuity far surpassed the level he was at back when he was an Empyrean God who used the [Torch Dragon's Eye].

"No need to be so worried, everyone. I've been through the Sea of Darkness before." A pudgy, fat-faced, chubby-eared youth next to Ning let out a merry chuckle. "The most dangerous race of creatures here in the Sea of Darkness is the race of 'Oddbats', but they live in groups deep within the Sea of Darkness. Based on my previous experience, we'll generally suffer just one attack every four or five days."

"YIIIIII!" An ear-piercing screech suddenly rang out.

A strange beast that was pitch-black in color and had a pair of bat-like

wings suddenly emerged out of nowhere from the spatial waves. It brandished its fierce claws as it charged straight towards one of the cultivators atop the vessel. Fortunately, that cultivator had been keeping a vigilant watch and immediately struck out with his enormous greataxe, the power of his blow causing space around him to congeal and turn almost solid.

“Kill.”

“Kill!”

One strange creature after began to emerge from the spatial waves, all having bat-like wings, incredibly sharp spear-like tails, and fierce claws.

“Oddbats!” Ning was wielding Violetjewel, while Su Youji had already entered her golem. She was able to control it at the same time as she controlled the many blade-like magic treasures around her.

“Kill! Kill!” One of the Oddbats flew onto the vessel and pounced straight towards Ning. Ning struck out with Violetjewel, transforming it into a streak of graceful sword-light that chopped straight towards the Oddbat’s neck. However, the Oddbat used its left claw to gracefully deflect the blow.

Clank!

When the sword clashed against the claw, a clanking sound was heard.

“According to the star map records I read pertaining to the Sea of Darkness, these Oddbat creatures have incredibly tough tails and claws, which are the hardest parts on their bodies and equivalent to Dao weapons. It seems this really is the case.” Still, Ning simply spun his sword-light in a relaxed, graceful manner.

Slash! How could a dumb creature such as an Oddbat possibly be able to defend against Ning’s marvelous sword-arts? The sword chopped straight through the Oddbat’s neck, severing its head from the rest of its body. Moments later, the Oddbat’s body began to completely break apart, leaving nothing behind.

Oddbats...

They were unique creatures that were formed from the unique environs of the Sea of Darkness. They possessed extremely low levels of intelligence, and they usually lived for only shockingly brief periods of time. Although they had World-level power, they lived for less than three centuries. Once three centuries passed, their bodies would naturally disintegrate and leave nothing behind. The only way for them to live longer was for them to undergo a fundamental evolution.

It could be said that there were three tiers of Oddbats. There were the black Oddbats, the silver Oddbats, and the golden Oddbats. The black Oddbats only lived for less than three centuries, the silver Oddbats lived for less than a chaos cycle, but the golden Oddbats could live forever.

However, every part of a golden Oddbat's body was a precious treasure. Generally speaking, when Samsara Daolords encountered them, they would immediately kill them and collect the corpse! Thus, there were very few golden Oddbats in the Sea of Darkness.

“Kill!”

Slash!

Bang!

Magic treasures flew everywhere, as did sword-light, saber-light, and divine abilities.

The cultivators aboard the flying vessel all used the various techniques they had available to quickly massacre any of the Oddbats who dared to invade their vessel. After battling for a short period of time, the remaining Oddbats all retreated.

Hundreds of Oddbats had taken part in this battle, all of black-colored ones who were fairly weak.

“That was certainly easy.”

“We beat them pretty easily.”

“I barely had a chance to even fight.”

The previously nervous cultivators all glanced at each other. Many were

now much more relaxed than before.

“We were lucky this time. We only encountered black Oddbats. If a silver Oddbat had come, things would’ve been much more troublesome. I’ve heard that silver Oddbats are very nearly comparable to transcendent World Gods in power,” the chubby-faced youth chortled.

“Ol’ brother Ninehearts, can you please shut your yap? I don’t want to run into one of those silver Oddbats.” An old man next to him who had a face that looked like the withered bark of a dried tree shook his head helplessly.

“Silver Oddbats are nothing. According to the legends I heard, there are golden Oddbats as well,” the chubby-faced youth said.

Time slowly flowed on.

It was just as World God Ninehearts said. Every four or five days, they would suffer an attack. Every so often, a silver Oddbat would appear amongst the ranks of the black Oddbats!

None of the ninety-nine cultivators aboard the flying vessel were weak. Most were master-class World-level cultivators, and there were at least three supreme World-level cultivators! This was based on the amount of power they had displayed thus far.

A single supreme World-level cultivator, supported by the power of the formation, was enough to contend against one of the silver Oddbats.

“There really is strength in numbers.” Ning continued to relax in his corner of the flying vessel. Thus far, he hadn’t even used any divine abilities, much less the azureflower mist energy.

Ninety-nine World-level cultivators fighting in unison truly made for a powerful force. There was no need for Ning to fight too hard; they were able to easily defeat the repeated attacks by the Oddbats.

Three hundred and eleven years passed after their entry into the Sea of Darkness. The flying vessel continued to advance through the chaotic waves.



“Come, brother Darknorth. Drink with us!”

“Brother Poisonfeather.”

“Fairy Yun.”

The vessel was filled with the sound of laughter. Everyone was drinking and chatting, but they were also ready to engage in battle at a moment's notice. They had gotten accustomed to fighting every few days during the past three centuries.

The battles had all been quite easy. Most of the World-level cultivators on the ship, Ning included, had yet to be forced to show their true power.

Roughly ten trillion kilometers away from them, in a region of chaotic space, an incredibly dense cluster of black Oddbats and a few silver Oddbats were ‘escorting’ a completely golden Oddbat. The golden Oddbat spread out its golden wings just a bit, its intelligent eyes staring at the distant flying vessel.

# Chapter 21: Ambushed

“Everything has been verified?” The golden Oddbat spoke verbally, its shrill voice reverberating in a strange manner that caused ripples to appear in the already-chaotic space around it.

“Everything has been verified, your Highness. That flying vessel is indeed crewed by World-level cultivators, and there are ninety-nine of them in total.” A silver Oddbat responded respectfully to the query.

Oddbats were extremely dumb creatures, with the black ones only capable of calling out for blood and mayhem. It was difficult for them to even form complete sentences. However, once they evolved to become silver Oddbats they would gain a much longer lifespan and a dramatically increased level of intelligence. Silver Oddbats were at least comparable to ordinary mortals in intelligence.

“Ninety-nine World-level cultivators?” The golden Oddbat stared coldly towards the distant vessel. “They actually managed to mass such a large number of cultivators? That probably means they don’t have any Samsara Daolords amongst their ranks. Samsara Daolords wouldn’t bother with waiting so long, they’d just go through by themselves. Mm... since that’s the case, ehehe...”

Oddbats had a strange fetish; they delighted in eating the flesh of cultivators. They could even devour the incredibly tough bodies of most World Gods! So long as those divine bodies had not reached the Dao weapon level, the golden Oddbats would be able to crunch through them like candy. To the golden Oddbats, cultivators were the finest delicacies in existence.

This was exacerbated by the fact that Oddbats generally tended to be massacred in vast numbers by travelers. Even their kings, the golden Oddbats, would often find themselves killed by Samsara Daolords if they were careless. Thus, the race of Oddbats harbored tremendous hatred for cultivators in general.

“What luck. The Sea of Darkness is such a vast place, but I actually

managed to run into a vessel of cultivators. Kill them, my children!" The golden Oddbat let out a shrill shriek as it ordered, "Wipe out all the cultivators on that vessel! Kill them all!"

"Yes." The nine silver Oddbats assented respectfully in unison.

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!" The many black Oddbats all cried out in a raucous chorus.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

The dense cluster of Oddbats all quickly passed through the spatial waves and flew towards the distant flying vessel. The Oddbats were born from within the Sea of Darkness and thus were born with the innate ability to conceal themselves within the violent spatial tempests within the Sea. This was the reason why they were able to fly close to the vessel without being detected.

The Sea of Darkness was incredibly vast, but it had very few golden Oddbats within it. Even though the vessel Ning's group was in was incredibly fast, it would still need more than six centuries to pass through the Sea. One could imagine how utterly vast it was! This was why it was extremely rare for a group to be unlucky enough to encounter a golden Oddbat. In fact, dozens of squads would often pass through the Sea without a single squad encountering one.

"Master, before we entered the Sea of Darkness you frightened me half to death with the stories about how dangerous this place is. Well? Look at how relaxed we all are!" Su Youji was seated next to Ji Ning in a corner of the vessel. The two were engaged in conversation.

"That's because you have more than ninety other cultivators fighting alongside you, helping you deal with those Oddbats. If the two of us had to deal with them all by ourselves, what do you think would happen?" Ning gave her a sideways glance.

Su Youji blinked.

What would happen?

Although Ji Ning was strong, he was still just one person. He'd only be

able to deal with a portion of the Oddbats at any given point in time. Su Youji would have to rely on her golem and the bugbeasts to fight against them, but she'd still be in grave danger.

But of course, now that they had ninety-nine cultivators and a supportive formation, things were completely different.

"If I have to blame someone, I'm going to blame you for not having sufficiently detailed information," Su Youji mumbled. "The awe-inspiringly, inconceivably famous Daolord Nihilate failed in his Daomerge and is now searching for a disciple. How is it that your intelligence reports made no mention of such earth-shaking news?"

Ning couldn't help but let out an involuntarily snort.

The Sea of Darkness was an incredibly dangerous place. Although it was located next to the Qianyun Territory, in normal times it was extremely rare for cultivators to pass through the Sea, and they would only do so if they had an extremely special reason for it. It would take a very long period of time for ninety-nine World-level cultivators to be gathered. In contrast, this time they had managed to reach this figure in a very short period of time.

This was because of something which had happened on the other end of the Sea of Darkness, within the Jadesea Territory. A Samsara Daolord known as Daolord Nihilate had failed in his Daomerge, then had publicly proclaimed that he wished to take on a disciple!

Daolord Nihilate was an incredibly famous figure, especially in the surrounding territories. However, he was a solitary figure with no sect and no disciples to his name.

Now that he had failed in his Daomerge, he had suddenly realized that he didn't have any heirs at all. This was why he had chosen to accept a disciple. Daolords who had failed in the Daomerge were all at least Verge-class Daolords who were just as powerful as Daolord Solesky! If such a powerful Daolord wished to take on a disciple, almost every World-level cultivator would be willing to sacrifice almost anything in order to become that disciple!

Although this master would undoubtedly die in the future, it was a fact that even a World God like Northrest was able to survive for a full chaos cycle before his truesoul faded away. So long as Daolord Nihilate didn't go crazy and engaged in repeated, frenzied battles, he would be able to stay alive for an extremely long period of time. By the time he passed away, his guidance probably would've resulted in his student becoming a Samsara Daolord as well.

More importantly... who would dare to antagonize you if you had a master who had just failed his Daomerge? It could be said that prior to your master dying, you could do whatever you wished and be completely unchallenged. More than 80% of the people on Ning's vessel were heading to the Jade Sea Territory to try and take on Daolord Nihilate as their master.

"While travelling to this place from the Badlands Territory, I heard quite a few legends and stories about things that had happened in the ancient past. I heard many stories about truly powerful Daolords who failed their Daomerge, their Daos vanishing and their lives ending..." Ning shook his head and sighed. "I really have heard of very few Daolords who succeeded in their Daomerge."

Ning was worried about Daolord Solesky. Although they hadn't had many interactions with each other, Daolord Solesky truly had treated Ning as he would a brother. In the Windsourc Ruins, Daolord Solesky had suffered severe injuries but elected to go all-out in attempting to locate Ning before even treating his own wounds. Only after he had located Ning had he calmed down and started to heal himself. Ning had felt tremendously moved by him when Ning saw this.

"Watch out!"

"YIIIIII!"

A sudden, shocking, high-pitched Oddbat shriek suddenly rang out. The cultivators who had been chatting calmly amongst each other instantly took control of their respective treasures and weapons, then started to attack.

Slash! Sword-light flashed in Ning's hands as he slew a black Oddbat. The creature's head went flying off, then the rest of its body dissipated into nothingness.

"What?!" Ning's face suddenly fell dramatically.

A tight, dense cluster of black Oddbats had appeared in the area around the vessel. There were far more Oddbats this time than there had ever been in the past, at least ten times more than the previous record! There had to be thousands of the things. They all circled around the vessel, causing it to slow down and eventually come to a full stop, unable to move any further.

"Transform.' Ning's body blurred as he manifested three heads and six arms. He now wielded six Violetjewels in his arms.

"Careful, everyone."

"There are nine of those silver Oddbats."

The situation instantly turned extremely grim as all the cultivators began to grow nervous. It must be understood that every single silver Oddbat was comparable to a transcendent World God in power. Even though the cultivators were all supported by the power of their formation, they had to have originally possessed the power of a supreme World God if they wished to be able to give the silver Oddbats a good fight.

Whoosh. Ning's sword-light spun out in a beautiful arc, causing eight of the black Oddbats around him to be annihilated.

"Youji, bind this bugnest." Ning immediately tossed a jade green globe to Su Youji. As soon as she bound it, she would be in control of the fifty-one bugbeasts stored within it. Given how ugly the situation was looking and how many Oddbats were attacking, Ning was worried that he wouldn't be able to protect her.

"Alright." Su Youji nodded. She wouldn't decline or be polite at a time like this, and she immediately bound the treasure.

"Kill."

“Kill.”

“There’s too many of these Oddbats!”

“Why are there so many?”

“Block that silver Oddbat!”

A wild battle was occurring atop the flying vessel. Magic treasures flew everywhere while World Gods charged to and fro.

“Let me deal with this silver Oddbat.”

“I’ll handle that one!”

The cultivators on the vessel had never experienced a truly dangerous situation during this trip. Quite a few of them had therefore been hiding their true power. Now, however, they had to reveal everything. There were actually more than ten cultivators who had the power of supreme World Gods! It made sense. If you wanted to become a disciple of Daolord Nihilate, you had to have enough power to back up that goal.

“Kill!”

Ning had transformed into a ghostly blur, his swords becoming even more ephemeral and unpredictable than before. They struck out lightning fast, causing Oddbats to perish wherever they went. The Oddbats were completely unable to defend against Ning’s terrifying sword-art.

During the past three hundred-plus years, Ning had often sent incarnations of divine power into the estate-worlds of the Mirrorsnow Paintings to challenge the guardians. His sword-arts were now much more powerful than they had been back in the Badlands Territory.

“Wipe out any Oddbats that get near me.” Su Youji summoned her bugbeasts, calling out a total of thirty of them to surround her and slay any Oddbats that dared to draw near her.

The black Oddbats were all quite weak, after all. These bugbeasts all had the power of master-class World Gods; plenty strong enough to deal with Oddbats.

Cultivators were engaged in fierce battles throughout the entire vessel.

As a result, they were able to just barely hold their own against this assault by the nine silver Oddbats and thousands of black Oddbats.



## Chapter 22: Golden Oddbat

More and more black Oddbats died as the battle progressed, resulting in the cultivators relaxing slightly. Although the situation was still quite grim, they were no longer under as much pressure as they were before.

The chubby, fat-faced youth named World God Ninehearts suddenly turned his head to stare off into the distance, his face turning pale. He immediately shouted mentally to everyone, "Watch out!"

Whoosh!

A blurry figure suddenly appeared out of nowhere next to a tall, skinny World God who was dressed in black armor. The World God was already engaged in battle, but he hurriedly chopped out with the waraxe in his hands.

Clank!

Crunch!

The illusory figure suddenly seemed to wrap itself around the World God's head. Crunch! The head was bitten clean off. Only now did the other cultivators on the vessel see that the creature which had bit off the head of the World God was a golden Oddbat. The golden Oddbat's wings were spread out and its terrifying aura had completely enveloped the entire vessel. It then swallowed down the rest of the World God's body into its tummy.

"A golden Oddbat." The faces of all the cultivators present turned ashen.

Golden Oddbats were unique, legendary creatures of the Sea of Darkness. They were the most terrifying creatures that could be found in the Sea! Silver Oddbats were comparable to transcendent World Gods, while golden Oddbats were comparable to Daolords of the First Step. Powerful Samsara Daolords were able to easily slaughter golden Oddbats, treating their body parts as valuable treasures, but World-level cultivators viewed the golden Oddbats as utter nightmares. How many World-level cultivators were able to battle against Daolords of the First Step?

Ninety-eight cultivators were still alive, but the death of that single cultivator resulted in the strength of the formation dropping by nearly 30%! If the ninety-eight cultivators worked together, they would be able to withstand that golden Oddbat. The problem was that there were nine silver Oddbats and thousands of black Oddbats attacking them as well. The cultivators present simply didn't have any excess capacity to spare right now.

"Careful, everyone! Hold on for as long as you can. Brother Ninehearts, brother Loopwise, join me in fighting against that golden Oddbat. If we let it slaughter the others, all of us are going to die." The master of the flying vessel, the bald silver-eyed World God Poisonfeather, sent a hurried mental message to the others.

World God Poisonfeather, World God Ninehearts, and World God Loopwise were the supreme World Gods on the vessel who were not tied down in combat against a silver Oddbat.

"Hurry up and go."

"Leave the other Oddbats to us."

"Be careful!"

The other cultivators all gritted their teeth as they fought, doing their best to hold on as long as they could.

The three supreme World Gods Poisonfeather, Ninehearts, and Loopwise all transformed into streaks of light as they flew straight towards that golden Oddbat.

The golden Oddbat watched coldly as those three powerful cultivators charged towards it. It was extremely confident in its own powers. It was capable of avoiding the three, but why would it even see the need to avoid the three?

They were merely World-level cultivators. In the golden Oddbat's eyes, these cultivators were nothing more than tasty snacks!

"Puny cultivators..." The golden Oddbat spread wide its golden, bat-like wings as the three cultivators reached its side. Supported and empowered

by the group formation, they could be considered to have just barely reached the transcendent World God level of power.

“Light.” World God Poisonfeather had a solemn look on his face. He stabbed forward with the pike in his hands, a spot of light appearing at its tip. The surrounding area was completely plunged into darkness, leaving behind only that single tip of light.

“Die.” World God Loopwise complete transformed a savage, roaring wave of blood. Flickers of saber-light could be seen flashing within this wave of blood as it surged towards the golden Oddbat.

“If you don’t die, who will?” The chubby, fat-faced youth World God Ninehearts struck out with his longspear, causing spacetime to distort and fold in on itself. It seemed as though there was no way for anyone to dodge this spear no matter what.

These three were amongst the most powerful cultivators on this vessel. Although the other cultivators were furiously defending against the onslaught of the other Oddbats, they were able to spare a little bit of attention to watch this battle. When they saw these three killer moves being unleashed, they couldn’t help but feel a hint of eagerness.

Rumble...

The golden Oddbat suddenly flapped its giant golden bat wings. As soon as its wings moved, all of the chaotic spatial waves around it suddenly turned still... and then, the golden Oddbat itself became the source of all of the spatial waves in this area. Its flapping wings began to kick up an enormous spatial tempest as the wings began to rapidly increase in size, to the point where the wings seemed large enough to cover the entire vessel.

Poisonfeather’s lance, Loopwise’s saber-light, Ninehearts’ longspear...

Boom! Boom! Boom! A series of explosions rang out.

All three World Gods were knocked flying backwards. They slammed hard into the deck of the ship, all three of them vomiting out blood.

“How can this be?”

“How can it be this powerful?”

“Three supreme World Gods, supported by our formation, aren’t even able to withstand a single strike from it?”

“How can...”

The ninety-plus cultivators instantly felt their hearts freeze and their hopes vanish. Apparently, those three supreme World Gods weren’t even close to being a match for the golden Oddbat. Most likely, all of the supreme World Gods on the vessel would have to join forces in order to have a chance! Alas, the vessel was being assaulted by nine silver Oddbats and the thousands of black Oddbats as well.

“We are finished.” Some of the cultivators began to feel despair. They couldn’t come up with any solutions for dealing with these foes.

“In terms of technique or their mastery of the Dao, those three are my equals.” Ning had watched carefully as those three had charged forward. He had actually followed right behind them, watching them test out the golden Oddbat in the hopes that he could get a sense of how powerful it truly was.

As soon as those enormous bat-wings had flapped, the three World Gods had been knocked flying backwards.

Ning frowned slightly upon seeing this. He was quickly able to come to a series of judgments. “So it really is true! Oddbats are all incredibly dumb creatures. Even golden Oddbats are only talented in the Dao of Space because of their incredible innate gifts in this Dao. Despite that, their insights are only comparable to the insights of ordinary World-level cultivators.”

Oddbats. The black Oddbats had the intelligence level of ordinary human infants, and they knew almost no combat techniques at all. They relied entirely on their innate gifts to battle.

Golden Oddbats were far more powerful, but their insights into the Dao were merely comparable to the insights of ordinary World-level cultivators. They weren’t even close to being a match for Ning and the

others in this regard.

“Its insights into the Dao are quite ordinary! The problem is that it is incredibly fast and possesses overwhelming physical power.” Ning’s eyelids twitched slightly. “Its body is incredibly tough. No wonder everyone says that the corpse of a golden Oddbat is a priceless treasure. Its various parts can be used to forge Eternal weapons.”

The claws, fangs, and tail of a golden Oddbat were all comparable to Eternal weapons. Its other parts were slightly weaker but still formidable. For example, its wings were soft but resilient, while its skin was quite smooth. Its entire body was terrifyingly strong, granting it incredible speed and strength. When it had flapped its enormous wings just now, it actually hadn’t used any intricate techniques. It had relied on its overwhelming superiority in strength to send those three cultivators halfway to Hell!

“Cultivators are truly useless.” The golden Oddbat spread out its enormous wings once more as it stood there atop the flying vessel. It turned its cold, insidious gaze towards the other cultivators on the boat. All of the cultivators began to feel a sense of despair. What were they going to do? How were they supposed to stop it?

“How boring. All of you can go die now. Ahahaha...” The golden Oddbat let out an ear-piercing laugh as it suddenly pounced towards the nearest cultivator, who hurriedly beat a frantic retreat in terror.

Swish!

A blinding streak of sword-light suddenly pierced through the air towards the golden Oddbat, colliding directly against the golden Oddbat’s sharp claws.

Clang! The golden Oddbat was brought to a momentary halt.

As for Ning, he couldn’t help but stumble backwards by three steps, each step so heavy as to cause the entire vessel to tremble.

Ning’s eyes narrowed as he stared at the golden Oddbat. He was now supported by the azureflower mist energy; with its energy supporting him, the additional power granted by the formation was almost negligible.

“What terrifying strength. It is far stronger than I am.”

The golden Oddbat stopped moving as it turned to stare at Ning, weighing him.

The entire vessel fell silent. All the cultivators turned to focus on this sight.

Ji Ning had manifested three heads and six arms and was wielding six swords. He and the golden Oddbat were staring at each other intently from afar.

The golden Oddbat continued to stare weighingly at Ning, then let out another one of those ear-piercing laughs. Its voice echoed throughout the surrounding void as it said, “I didn’t expect to find someone so powerful here. You should be the most powerful person on this vessel.”

“That’s brother Darknorth.”

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth!”

The other cultivators were overjoyed upon seeing this. They were stunned at the level of power which Ning had just unleashed, but they were also filled with a powerful urge and hope to stay alive!

“But it is useless. You will still die.” The golden Oddbat let out that bizarre laugh. “All the cultivators on this vessel will die!” As it laughed, it transformed into a blur as it pounced straight towards Ning.

“Kill!” Ning didn’t back down in the slightest, charging straight forward with six Violetjewels at the ready.

Ning was like a streak of light while the golden Oddbat was like an illusory blur. The two instantly collided against each other! Ning possessed astonishing speed and strength, but the golden Oddbat was superior to even Ning in these two aspects.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The two instantly clashed dozens of times. No one dared to draw near the two of them.

BOOM! An enormous explosion rang out as the golden tail and the

sword-light both struck the deck of the flying vessel at the same time, knocking it askew and flipping it over. All of the cultivators and Oddbats were sent flying out of the vessel. They all hurriedly moved to avoid Ji Ning and the golden Oddbat, who had now truly begun to fight.

# Chapter 23: Terror

The Dao-tree Ji Ning's Jindan chaos region was now more than ninety thousand meters tall. His Sword World was incredibly powerful, and the six Violetjewels in his hands were Eternal weapons of ridiculous power. Ning also had the azureflower mist energy reinforcing him, making his body comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step, and yet...

BOOM!

Ning was sent staggering backwards, but his swordplay remained orderly. He stared intently at the distant golden Oddbat.

"It is simply too physically strong." Ning felt genuine amazement in his heart. "It clearly has terrible combat techniques, but it is still able to suppress me."

The golden Oddbat's wings were spread, but its gaze was turned towards the other cultivators in the distance as it watched those ninety-plus cultivators fight against its many children. The cultivators were slowly gaining the upper hand as the number of black Oddbats began to decline, causing the golden Oddbat to feel rather impatient.

"Hmph, I'll let you stay alive for a bit longer." The golden Oddbat let out an ear-piercing screech as it shot out in a solitary arc, seeking to move past Ning and assault the other cultivators.

"What?!"

"Not good!"

The ninety-plus cultivators had all been paying attention to the battle between the golden Oddbat and Ning. They were all shocked to see the golden Oddbat head their way.

They all knew how incredibly fast the golden Oddbat was. Previously, the golden Oddbat had simply been so proud and arrogant that it had stood there without moving, allowing those three World Gods to assault it. It had battled against Ning for quite some time before it began to grow impatient. It set aside its pride, intending to move around Ning and slay



the other cultivators instead.

“No running!” Ning let out a loud roar as the Thunderlight Wings suddenly appeared on his back. The Thunderlight Wings fluttered slightly, causing his speed to dramatically increase.

“Halt!” A dazzling, eye-catching streak of crimson-gold lightning suddenly shot out of Ning’s forehead. This streak of crimson-gold lightning moved with incredible speed, far faster than the golden Oddbat itself. The lightning furiously smote the golden Oddbat with a direct blow! This was one of the streaks of [Novessence Thunder] which Ning had mastered.

Crackle! Hiss! The crimson-gold lightning completely surrounded the golden Oddbat’s body. The golden Oddbat was so powerful that it could completely ignore the damage caused by the crimson-gold lightning, but the lightning had a powerful restrictive effect on it. It was like a supreme World God was doing everything he could to keep his arms wrapped around it, causing the golden Oddbat’s movements to be encumbered.

Ning was incredibly fast to begin with, his speed being comparable to that of ordinary Daolords. Now that he was using his Thunderlight Wings, the two were fairly close in speed. Given that golden Oddbat was being slowed down by Ning’s [Novessence Thunder], Ning was immediately able to catch up.

“Damn.” The golden Oddbat was enraged.

“Good!”

“Well done, brother Darknorth!”

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth truly is an admirable figure.”

Shouts of delight rang out from afar, as well as some laughter.

As Ning caught up to the golden Oddbat, his six Eternal weapons struck out like six blood-colored wyrms as he furiously assaulted the creature, once more stopping it in its tracks.

“Everyone, help me out by getting rid of the other Oddbats as soon as

possible,” Ning called out laughingly.

“Right on!”

“These Oddbats are easy to deal with.”

“Hurry up, fellow Daoists. It isn’t easy for brother Darknorth to fend off the golden Oddbat!” The cultivators could now see hope, and so they did their absolute best to wipe out the remaining Oddbats.

As for Ning, he continued to battle against the golden Oddbat in single combat while using the [Novessence Thunder] to bind it. The power of that crimson-gold lightning was completely applied to the golden Oddbat’s body, causing it to be slowed down slightly. Ning couldn’t help but sigh in amazement at how tough its body was.

“If I were to use the Elementum Waterflame Gourd and release the lightning it holds, it would definitely release more power than my [Novessence Thunder] possesses.” Ning couldn’t help but secretly sigh. “The problem is that it would just be one level of power stronger. I would at most have the upper hand but I still would find it difficult to actually kill this golden Oddbat.”

The Elementum Waterflame Gourd held two types of Dao lightning. Dao lightning was capable of sweeping aside almost anyone below the Daolord level of power! However, it was only capable of wiping out master-class World Gods in one strike; it was at most just slightly stronger than the [Novessence Thunder] which Ning had put such effort into creating.

When these two types of water-attribute and fire-attribute Dao lightning joined together, they would be significantly stronger, most likely capable of slaying supreme World Gods in one blow! They were capable of heavily injuring transcendent World Gods and have a major restrictive effect on Daolords of the First Step. Alas, the golden Oddbat was simply too physically tough, and its claws, fangs, and tail were comparable to Eternal weapons in might. Even its skin and its wings, some of its weaker body parts, were comparable to Dao weapons. It would be extremely difficult for Ning to injure it with his sword.

“In addition, the Elementum Waterflame Gourd is an important

treasure. I spent five hundred and fifty thousand cubes of chaos nectar for it! If I was to use it, everyone would be able to recognize it right away. Elementum Waterflame Gourds are incredibly famous Eternal weapons. If they recognize it... once these cultivators reach the other end of the Sea of Darkness, word of it being in my possession will spread and I'll probably be in a lot of trouble."

Although they were currently on the same vessel, a treasure worth over half a million cubes of chaos nectar was alluring for even many Samsara Daolords, to say nothing of World-level cultivators. The reason why Ning had purchased this treasure was to use it as a killer trump card! He would only use it in dire situations, when his very life was at stake. But of course, he also had it since he would need those two types of Dao lightning when training in the second part of the [Novessence Thunder].

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

"Ahaha, this is fun."

"Kill them all."

Thanks to Ning tying down the golden Oddbat, the other cultivators slowly began to gain the upper hand as more and more Oddbats perished.

"Fellow Daoist Darknorth, just hold it off for a while longer. We'll be ready to reinforce you soon."

"We'll be there shortly!"

The cultivators began to pick up the pace in killing the Oddbats.

As for the golden Oddbat, it let out a furious, ear-piercing screech. After having been tied down for so long, it finally couldn't take it any longer. It roared furiously, "Let's go, children! Let's go! Go!"

Boom! The golden Oddbat flapped its massive wings, creating a terrifying spatial tempest as it began to flee off into the distance.

The nine silver Oddbats and the few surviving black Oddbats all hastily fled as well, moving at incredibly fast speeds.

Ning stared as the golden Oddbat disappeared into the distance. He

didn't try to chase it. If he did, he would probably be surrounded and attacked by all of the Oddbats! In addition, these Oddbats were born and bred here in the Sea of Darkness. They knew it better than any cultivator. If Ning really did give chase, he might well be led into and trapped within a dangerous part of the Sea.

"It is over." Ning let out a sigh of relief. Being able to force these Oddbats into retreating was already an excellent outcome. Ning's goal was to reach Vastheaven Palace, after all. It wasn't to kill a golden Oddbat.

Atop the flying vessel.

The cultivators had all returned to the flying vessel, which once more began to accelerate.

"Brother Darknorth, it was all thanks to you that we made it. If it wasn't for you, we would probably all be dead."

"Haha, I'm embarrassed to say this, but all this time I felt certain that I was one of the strongest cultivators on this vessel. Now, it seems, brother Darknorth is capable of defeating me in a single blow."

"We actually encountered a transcendent World God on this trip, eh? This truly is a rare occasion. Come, fellow Daoist Darknorth. Let me offer you a toast!"

The vessel was filled with the sound of laughter.

Transcendent World Gods, when supported by the power of their formation, would be comparable to Daolords of the First Step. Thus, most of them felt certain that Ning was a transcendent World God. What they didn't realize was that Ning's own azureflower mist energy was actually far stronger than their formation, which had provided him with just a negligible amount of assistance.

Ning, of course, wouldn't tell them the truth. This was his secret.

"Without everyone else helping out, I probably would've ended up dying after being encircled by the golden Oddbat and thousands of other Oddbats." Ning also laughed as he chatted and drank with the other cultivators.

The spatial waves within the Sea of Darkness remained as savage as ever. The ninety-eight cultivators continued to fly through the Sea within their vessel, chatting, drinking, and celebrating their victory. But just at this moment...

Whoooooosh.

An enormous, pitch-black opening suddenly appeared within the spatial waves around them. The opening was over a million kilometers in size... and a head slowly began to emerge from within it.

This head was utterly enormous, at least a million kilometers in size as well. Its two eyes were like two enormous blazing suns, and it was staring right at the flying vessel.

“What?!”

“Good heavens...”

“What is...”

The carousing cultivators aboard the flying vessel all stared wide-eyed in horror, as did Ning. They could feel their true souls quivering in terror as an incredible, indescribable sense of danger crashed down upon them. This was a warning that the Destiny Sea was sending to them...

Whoosh. The enormous head opened its mouth, causing a pitch-black corridor of spacetime to appear. All of the cultivators were instantly drawn inwards towards its mouth. Ning was the strongest cultivator present, and he tried to activate his Thunderlight Wings to escape, but even he found it impossible to shake off that sucking effect.

The entire flying vessel was swallowed into the spacetime corridor of darkness located within the creature's mouth, as were all ninety-eight cultivators.

Spacetime was in a state of absolute flux within this dark corridor. Soon, the vessel and all ninety-eight cultivators completely vanished.

The blazing, sun-sized eyes of the titanic head swept the surrounding area with a glance, then slowly shrank back into the enormous dark cavity

from whence it came. That enormous dark hole then vanished as well and the Sea of Darkness once more returning to its regular appearance.

However, the ninety-eight cultivators and the flying vessel they had been in had completely vanished from the Sea of Darkness.

# Chapter 24: Taken By Force

A territory located unfathomably far away from the Sea of Darkness.

An enormous rhombus-shaped gemstone was located atop a chaos star, emanating ripples of power.

“I need to get closer to it. I can still move a bit closer.”

More than a hundred World-level cultivators had been gathered here atop this chaos star. Their gazes blazed as they stared at the enormous rhombus jewel that had been firmly planted into the ground off in the distance. The ripples emanating from the jewel were being transmitted straight into their minds.

“A karmic fortune has been placed before me. I have to grasp it.”

“I can keep moving closer.”

The World-level cultivators were like children who had just started to learn how to walk. Every single step they took was incredibly difficult, and the closer they moved to it, the more invisible pressure was applied to their very truesouls. Despite this, they continued to strive to move closer to the rhombus so that they might more clearly hear the voice that was hidden within those ripples of power.

The voice was like the voice of the Dao itself.

Whoosh.

An enormous, pitch-black hole that was over a million kilometers in size suddenly and silently opened above that chaos star. A titanic head slowly emerged from within the hole, and it stared with its two blazing sun-like eyes towards the cultivators below it.

“What the...”

The hundred-plus World-level cultivators were disturbed from their reverie. They had been consumed by delight upon encountering this tremendous karmic fortune, but they now all stared upwards in shock at the terrifying head that had just appeared. Their truesouls were all

shaking in terror!

Whoosh.

The enormous head opened its lips and inhaled, an enormous pitch-black spatial corridor appearing within its mouth. The hundred-plus World-level cultivators atop the chaos star were all drawn towards it, unable to resist its power in the slightest. They were all sucked into the spatial corridor, and even the rhombus jewel that had been planted onto the star was drawn in as well.

Gulp. The enormous head shut its mouth, then retreated back into the pitch-black hole which closed behind it.

Utter stillness was left behind in its wake.

.....

The Gelian Territory. This was one of the territories located beyond the control of the Dao Alliance. The Aeonians were in control of this territory.

Two beautifully dressed major powers were striding through the chaos of space.

Spacetime twisted and distorted around them. They seemed to be moving slowly, but each step they took allowed them to travel a far greater distance than World-level cultivators travelled through teleportation.

“Gorsch, you were actually willing to let little Gorho become apprenticed to me? That means if he becomes Awakened in the future, he’ll be considered at least partially my subordinate.” A dazzling beautiful woman dressed in long green robes chuckled merrily as she spoke.

“In all my years, I’ve never seen any descendants of mine who have more potential than Little Gorho. Although he is currently just a World-level cultivator, I’ve raised him and taught him so that he is capable of battling against Daolords of the First Step. And that’s not even his limit! His greatest skill lies in the Dao of Spacetime... and you are one of the top two masters of spacetime in our entire Aeonian race. Only by apprenticing himself to you can he truly reach the greatest heights possible in the Dao of Spacetime.” The silver-haired, middle-aged man had a look of desire in



his eyes.

The silver-haired man continued, “The stronger one is prior to being Awakened, the more they will benefit after their Awakening, and the more potential they will have! I’ve watched as little Gorho grew up and taught him step-by-step. It is true that as your disciple, he’ll be considered as half your subordinate... but for the sake of his future growth, I decided to let you take advantage of me.”

“You are making it sound as though I’m taking huge advantage of you.” The green-robed woman laughed. “I’ll have to spend a lot of effort in teaching him, you know?”

“There aren’t many of us Aeonians, and there are even fewer descendants with as much potential as this child. Little Gorho can Awaken himself whenever he wishes, but been intentionally suppressing himself. Don’t pretend you haven’t won the lottery by gaining a disciple of such potential,” the silver-haired man said.

“Let’s make things clear from the get-go. Since he is going to be my disciple, I’m going to keep him by my side for a full chaos cycle,” the green-robed woman said. “You are not permitted to interfere.”

“Fine.” The silver-haired man assented.

The two chatted and laughed as they strolled through the void of space, quickly reaching a different chaosworld.

“Eh!?” The green-haired woman’s face tightened. A speck of golden light appeared in each of her eyes that shone down upon the surrounding region of spacetime. A solemn look on her face, she immediately said, “The spacetime in the surrounding area has been forcibly distorted.”

“Forcibly distorted?” The silver-haired man’s face tightened as well. He immediately sent out his senses to scan the entire chaosworld.

“Where’s little Gorho?”

“Why is he missing?”

The silver-haired man was stunned. “Why are even his servants... wait,

even the protectors of this chaosworld are missing?” According to the rules he had set down, the protectors were absolutely forbidden from leaving without his permission as this was an incredibly important part of the territory of King Gorsch.

But now, all of the World-level cultivators had gone missing from this chaosworld, including his most cherished descendant Gorho.

“My subordinates would never leave without my permission. Someone must’ve slaughtered them or captured them.” Flames began to flicker around the silver-haired man’s body, and his eyes became filled with a murderous look. “If spacetime has been distorted here, we should be able to trace the ripples of spacetime to locate the person who did this. I’m going to kill him. I’m going to KILL HIM.”

“You can’t kill him...” The green-haired woman had an ugly look on her face.

“Eh?” The silver-haired man turned to look at her.

“I can’t find any traces at all. The person who twisted spacetime here is even stronger than me in the Dao of Spacetime,” the green-haired woman explained. “There’s no way at all for you to stop him if he chooses not to fight you.”

“Even stronger than you in the Dao of Spacetime?” The silver-haired man could hardly believe it.

“Who on earth did this?” The green-robed woman frowned. “Could it be the Dao Alliance? There’s only a few members of the Dao Alliance capable of doing such a thing, but would they really lower themselves to act against little Gorho? They wouldn’t, right...?”

.....

A blazingly hot chaos star. An enormous pitch-black hole suddenly appeared above it, followed by that gigantic head slowly emerging from within it. It opened its mouth and began to suck in the entire chaos star. The chaos star transformed into a blazing beast of fire with an aura of incredible power. Struggling to break free, it let out a furious roar: “Who

are you?!”

“Time to come home, child.” The gigantic beast-head gave a simple reply, then sucked the blazing creature towards the pitch-black spatial corridor that had appeared in its mouth.

Whoosh. The blazing creature wasn’t able to fight back at all. It flew closer and closer towards the spatial corridor, shrinking in size as it did before finally being completely sucked in.

The gigantic head retreated from the black hole, which quickly closed behind it.

.....

“How diverting.” A human-shaped figure that was completely formed out of water was seated in the emptiness of space, staring curiously at the world around it.

Whoosh. A pitch-black hole appeared next to it, followed by the emergence of that titanic head.

“Little newborn child...”

The titanic head opened up its mouth and began to draw in the watery figure.

“Uh? Eh?” The watery humanoid figure found itself irresistibly pulled towards that spatial corridor. It watched with curiosity, not trying to fight back at all. This was because it didn’t sense even the slightest bit of enmity or hostility from the seemingly terrifying creature before it.

.....

During this period of time, many powerful creatures mysteriously vanished from throughout the Endless Territories.

When Ji Ning and the other cultivators aboard the flying vessel were drawn into the spacetime corridor, they could sense space and time twisting around them. It was quite similar to the feeling of being transported through a spacetime transfer array.

“This is a spacetime transfer. Where are we being transferred to?” Ning

and the other cultivators were all filled with unease. The behemoth which had sucked them in was simply too powerful.

Whoosh. Spacetime suddenly stabilized once more.

“Where are we?” Ning could now see that there were at the peak of a towering mountain. They had been teleported to this incredibly large mountain, and there were many other living beings here already. More than half were cultivators, and there had to be over a thousand cultivators gathered here.

Ning and the other ninety-seven cultivators first put away the flying vessel, then looked around cautiously.

“What is this place?”

“Fellow Daoists, where are we? How do we leave this place?” World God Xiang Lu immediately queried the cultivators who had arrived here before them.

A black-robed cultivator glanced at World God Xiang Lu, then slowly shook his head. “There’s no way to leave. This mountain peak is surrounded by restrictive spells. You won’t be able to take so much as a single step off of the mountain. As for the mountain itself, we aren’t able to damage it in the slightest. To tell you the truth, we just got here a few hours before you did.”

When Ning and the others heard this, their faces tightened slightly as pensive looks appeared in their eyes.

Right at this moment, yet another hundred-plus cultivators suddenly appeared out of nowhere. All of the cultivators looked quite lost and uneasy.

# Chapter 25: The Most Powerful Kingdom

Ji Ning stared at his surroundings. Many of the cultivators who had arrived alongside him tested out the borders of the mountain peak, only to find that it was indeed surrounded by invisible restrictive spells. As for flying upwards, they were only able to fly roughly three hundred meters into the air before being unable to move another inch.

“What sort of restrictive spell is this?” Ning gave the invisible barrier in front of him a push. Even when Ning applied his azureflower mist energy, he was completely unable to budge the barrier in the slightest.

“That mysterious behemoth felt absolutely terrifying. Not even big brother Solesky or Daolord Badlands gave me a sensation of such absolute terror.” Ning was still amazed by this. Both Daolord Solesky and Daolord Badlands were extremely powerful Daolords of the Endless Territories. “Perhaps it was because the two of them were very kind towards me, which was why I didn’t sense much danger from them.”

“Master! Master!” Su Youji appeared by Ning’s side.

“Mm?” Ning looked at her.

Su Youji said urgently, “Master, I heard some of the cultivators say that they are from the Springman Territory and appeared here after being swallowed by that behemoth. Other cultivators said that they were from the Vastheaven Territory before being swallowed...”

Ning was startled.

The Springman Territory? Never heard of it.

The Vastheaven Territory? That was where he was headed towards.

They had all been swallowed by that behemoth? For a single behemoth of such terrifying power to exist in the Endless Territories was already quite impressive. Ning refused to believe that multiple such beasts existed.

“After the behemoth swallowed us, it formed a spatial corridor within its mouth.” Ning reflected on this. “It would appear as though this mysterious behemoth is extremely, extremely skilled in the Dao of Spacetime. This

might be the reason why it was able to appear within so many places in the Endless Territories in such a brief period of time.”

“Perhaps it isn’t actually that much more powerful than my big brother Solesky. It is probably just incredibly talented in spacetime.” This was what Ning told himself to console himself, but he also understood just how terrifying this creature had to be in order for it to appear in so many places at once.

It must be understood that Daolord Solesky had to physically, laboriously travel all the way from the Vastheaven Territory to the Badlands Territory, making usage of many spacetime transfer arrays on the way! The ability to effortlessly appear throughout the Endless Territories was an utterly inconceivable ability.

Ning consoled himself, telling himself that it was possible that the mysterious behemoth wasn’t really that powerful. If this was the case, his chances of escaping would be a bit better. And yet, deep in his heart he knew the truth...

That the more likely possibility was that this mysterious behemoth was extremely, extremely powerful! Far more powerful than Daolord Solesky! It must be understood that Daolord Allgod was an example of someone who vastly outstripped Daolord Solesky. In fact, he had even been capable of chasing down and assaulting Eternal Emperors!

“What should I do? How should I leave this place?” Ning began to grow restless and nervous.

Was he supposed to just give up on his true body? Should he allow his clone in the Badlands Territory to once more work on rebuilding his main true body? It would be easy for him to rebuild his true body, but all of the treasures it was carrying... the six Eternal swords, the three Mirrorsnow Paintings, the Elementum Waterflame Gourd... there was no way to get them back.

“Where there is a will, there is a way.” Ning decided to just wait patiently. “Since the behemoth went to the trouble of pulling us to this place, it won’t just kill us for no reason.”

Time flowed on, day by day.

One day, two days, three days... more and more cultivators appeared on the mountain peak, as did many other types of living creatures.

Twelve days passed in the blink of an eye.

More than thirty thousand cultivators were now present at the mountain peak, as well as many other living creatures that were usually quite rare. There were plant-based lifeforms, flame-based lifeforms, stone-based lifeforms, and more. All of them were incredibly powerful, and there were thousands of them gathered here. These were some of the rarest types of lifeforms in the Endless Territories!

“Master, it seems as though no one else is coming.” Su Youji whispered softly to Ning from her position by his side.

“Yes. Half a day has gone by without any additional newcomers. I imagine we shall soon discover why we have been brought to this place.” Ning continued to wait and watch patiently.

More time passed, enough to brew a kettle of tea.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

Two streaks of light suddenly appeared in the skies, moving towards the mountain peak with terrifying speed.

“What terrifying speed.” The many cultivators and other creatures on the mountain peak were all stunned. Those two streaks of light were simply too fast. Ning had previously witnessed other fast creatures such as the golden Oddbat, but there was simply no comparison!

Boom! Boom!

The two streaks of light landed onto the mountain peak, causing the entire mountain to tremble. Only now could everyone see them clearly.

It was a pair of powerful experts garbed in silver armor, one male and one female. The silver-armored man’s armor was covered with the imprint of a thunderbolt, whereas the silver-armored woman’s armor was covered with the imprint of a sword. Both emanated auras of tremendous power

and majesty, causing the thirty thousand cultivators and other lifeforms to feel as though they could hardly breathe.

“Such power.” Ning could sense incredible danger radiating from the two. Although the two didn’t radiate as much danger as that mysterious behemoth, he was still certain that they could easily wipe out everyone present.

Behind each of the silver-armored duo was a pair of black-armored retainers.

The four black-armored retainers also had auras of tremendous power... and their aura was that of Samsara Daolords! Still, the auras weren’t that powerful; Ning felt as though they didn’t seem significantly stronger than the aura the golden Oddbat had.

“You have been selected by the almighty Hegemon from throughout the Endless Territories and delivered to this place. Quite a few of you possess tremendous potential.” The silver-armored man’s voice was deep, and it shook the entire mountain when he spoke. “Do not panic. For you to have been brought here, to the most powerful kingdom of the entire Endless Territories, is something of a tribulation, but it is an even greater blessing.”

When Ning and the others heard this, they all felt stunned.

Selected by the almighty Hegemon?

Was that mysterious behemoth this so-called almighty Hegemon? Ning suspected that this silver-armored man was an incredibly strong Daolord. For him to refer to someone else as an ‘almighty Hegemon’ was rather incredible. Still, when Ning thought about how that mysterious behemoth had been able to bring so many living beings from throughout the Endless Territories to this place, Ning felt that it made sense.

“The most powerful kingdom of the Endless Territories?” Ning muttered softly, “Can it be even stronger than the Aeonian Kingdom of the Aeonians?”

“Tremendous potential? Was our flying vessel captured because of me?”



Ning mused to himself. He wasn't being narcissistic; he was indeed an incredibly talented figure amongst his World-level peers. Even the amount of power he had revealed thus far was already quite shocking.

"Although you have been brought to this place, you are not yet citizens of the Brightshore Kingdom, the most powerful kingdom there is." The silver-armored man said, "If you cannot become one of our citizens, you shall perish! If you wish to survive, you must become one of our citizens."

"I am willing," a cultivator immediately cried out. "I'm willing to become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom!"

Some of the cultivators who had been abducted to this place were incredibly talented monsters like Ji Ning and Gorho, but even more were ordinary cultivators. For example, most of the cultivators who had been on Ning's vessel had wanted to take on Daolord Nihilate as master. They could tell that this mysterious Brightshore Kingdom was incredibly powerful. Most likely, joining it would be every bit as beneficial as becoming apprenticed on Daolord Nihilate.

"Not just anyone is qualified to become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom." The silver-armored man glanced sideways at the cultivators as he spoke in a calm voice.

"There are five ways in which you can become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom. The first method and best method is to break through to become a Samsara Daolord. If you do so, you can become one of our citizens."

Ning and the others were rendered speechless upon hearing this.

Become a Samsara Daolord?

Of the thirty thousand-plus cultivators who had been abducted to this place, not a single one was a Samsara Daolord. Breaking through to this level would be incredibly difficult.

"The second method is to be protected by one of our Samsara Daolords! Each Samsara Daolord is permitted to protect three of his or her friends, as well as take on a maximum of ten slaves," the silver-armored man said.

“If you are the friend or family member of a Samsara Daolord, you can naturally become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom as well. But of course, if you are willing to become a slave you are also permitted to continue living. Slaves are the lowest-tier members of the Brightshore Kingdom and will be assigned many labors, but at least they will be permitted to remain alive.”

Ning and the others frowned. Become slaves? Lowest-tier members of the kingdom? No one would wish for such a thing.

As for Samsara Daolords being able to protect three friends, this rule was most likely put into place because the Brightshore Kingdom understood that Samsara Daolords had people they cared about. However, Ning and the others had just arrived; how could they know any Samsara Daolords?

“The third method is the safest method. Go to the Hydragon Mountain in the Endless Territories and work there as a miner. If you can mine enough ore, you’ll be given your freedom and become one of our citizens. However, I have to warn you in advance that generally speaking, World-level cultivators will need to spend a thousand chaos cycles mining ore before they have enough.”

“Hydragon Mountain?” Gorho, unnoticed by the other cultivators, frowned slightly. “I heard Father speak of it before. Hydragon Mountain is a legendary place which is the birthplace of the extremely valuable hydragon gems. Supposedly, it has been occupied and monopolized by a mysterious organization. So that mysterious organization is actually this Brightshore Kingdom!”

The silver-armored man swept the cultivators with his gaze, a smile on his lips.

Mine for a thousand chaos cycles?

“I know that none of you are willing to laboriously mine ore for a thousand chaos cycles. However... in the future, many of you will cry and beg for the chance to go mine there.” The silver-armored man said calmly, “The fourth option is simple. Survive for a thousand years in the third

bugnest. If you are still alive after a thousand years, you can also become one of our citizens.”

# Chapter 26: The Choice

“Survive for a thousand years?” All of the cultivators and special lifeforms atop the mountain peak were intrigued. All of them were at the World level and had been abducted to this place. To people like them, a thousand years was nothing. Ji Ning, for example, was going to spend more than six hundred years just traversing the Sea of Darkness.

If they merely had to spend a thousand years to become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom and be permitted to live in peace, everyone would be willing to do this.

However, that was assuming they were able to survive for a thousand years. From the sound of things, the third bugnest wasn't a very nice place to be.

The silver-armored man had a hint of a cold smile on his face. “It might sound easy, but I have to warn you that the third bugnest is a place which our Brightshore Kingdom uses for rearing bugbeasts. In fact, it is our third most important nest! It has many powerful bugbeasts within it, some of which are comparable to Samsara Daolords.”

The silver-armored man continued, “Some of the bugbeasts there are weak, others are strong. There are even bugbeasts that are my equal in power, and all of them live within the third bugnest.”

The silver-armored man laughed. “If you choose this option, the fourth option, you'll have to spend a thousand years living within the third bugnest! If you are lucky enough not to run into any powerful bugbeasts, you might be able to survive for a thousand years with ease! But if you are unlucky and end up encountering some of the stronger bugbeasts, you might die almost instantly. Based on what we've seen in the past, roughly one in ten cultivators will be able to survive option four.”

Just one out of ten? The cultivators and special lifeforms atop the mountain peak all felt a sense of pressure.

Even the incredibly strong experts like Ji Ning and Gorho, as well as some of the mysterious lifeforms which possessed incredible power,

immediately abandoned the notion of choosing this option.

This option required luck. They were World-level cultivators, and even the most monstrously talented of them were only capable of battling Daolords of the First Step! Bugnest three had many terrifying bugbeasts, and according to the silver-armored man some of the bugbeasts were just as strong as him! If they ran into those bugbeasts, they would most assuredly be doomed!

Truly powerful experts wouldn't be willing to accept such a luck-based outcome.

"The fifth option." A strange smile played around the silver-armored man's lips.

"Let me explain the fifth option." The silver-armored woman spoke out coldly, her voice sharp enough that it seemed to stab into the true souls of every single cultivator and special lifeform present. "The fifth option is to go live on the Astral Islands. All you need to do is stay alive. The opponents you encounter on the Astral Islands will all be World-level cultivators. You need to battle against them, and in the end the most talented individuals will be allowed to survive and leave."

"Dare I ask what we will need to do on the Astral Islands?" A white-robed, incredibly handsome man who wielded a wooden staff in his hands spoke out.

The silver-armored woman glanced sideways at him then said calmly, "Once you go to the Astral Islands, you'll be told. Simply put, your opponents shall be other World-level cultivators who were similarly abducted from throughout the Endless Territories. Only the most talented cultivators shall survive the island and be allowed to leave it! Roughly one in a hundred will survive."

"What?"

"Only one in a hundred?"

"B-but..."

"This is crazy."

“Everyone there is at the World level?”

All of the cultivators and special lifeforms, as well as the secret descendants of the Aeonians, were shocked upon hearing this.

In truth, Ning and the other extremely powerful figures were all leaning towards the fifth option, because in the fifth option their competition would consist solely of other World-level cultivators. They felt confident that they were far more powerful than the vast majority of their peers. They weren't willing to risk their luck at the third bugnest... but on the other hand, it was true that the casualty rate for the fifth option was a bit too high.

Only one in a hundred would survive?

Even Ning was speechless.

Not even the Dao Alliance would dare to carry on such a competition. Every single World-level cultivator generally had masters or schools who supported them. The only reason the Brightshore Kingdom acted like this was because it had simply abducted outsiders from throughout the Endless Territories without caring about if they died or not. Only they would use such a brutal method to weed out the losers.

“Although I'm powerful, that's just amongst my fellow cultivators. There are quite a few special lifeforms who were abducted to this place as well.” Ning's greatest worry was having to deal with the special lifeforms. Some were weak, far weaker than cultivators even though they had some special techniques. Unfortunately, some were monstrously powerful.

Powerful special lifeforms usually were blessed with certain innate abilities that allowed them to be incredibly skilled in certain areas. For example, there were certain special lifeforms skilled in illusions who could possibly outmatch even World-level Heartforce Cultivators. It must be understood that Ning had yet to meet a single World-level Heartforce Cultivator to date!

“Just one in a hundred will survive. My opponents will consist of both the cultivators and the special lifeforms. What should I do? What should I choose?” Ning began to ponder this question.

“Five options. The first three options are very safe.” The silver-armored man and the silver-armored woman exchanged a glance. The silver-armored man said casually, “Become a Samsara Daolord, receive the protection of a Samsara Daolord, or become an eternal slave to a Samsara Daolord! Of course, you can also choose to go mining. These are all options with no risk to them.”

Very few would choose the first three options.

Becoming a Samsara Daolord wasn't something you could do just because you wanted it.

Receiving the protection of a Samsara Daolord wasn't that likely.

Become a slave? No one was willing to do such a thing. Few to no World-level cultivators would voluntarily become the slave of another. They all knew that becoming a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom would represent a tremendous blessing, but becoming a slave of the lowest caste meant that they probably would have no future prospects.

Mine for a thousand chaos cycles? That was way too long.

“The fourth option is to survive in the third bugnest for a thousand years. Roughly one in ten will survive.” The silver-armored man continued, “The fifth option is go to the Astral Islands and compete against your peers. One in a hundred will survive.”

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

The silver-armored man waved his hand, causing four streams of light to instantly appear and partition off the mountain peak.

“Those who choose the second option, enter the first region. Those who choose the third option, enter the second region. This region is for the fourth option. This region is for the fifth option.” The silver-armored man casually pointed to each of the partitions in turn, then swept his gaze across everyone present atop the mountain. “Choose your paths.”

Everyone atop the mountain peak began to move. Many were hesitating, but the silver-armored duo didn't rush anyone. They just stood there and waited quietly.

Slowly, people began to make their choices.

A cultivator stepped into the second region. This represented a decision to go spent roughly a thousand chaos cycles in the mines. Only then would they have enough ore to become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom.”

“I’m too weak. My chances of surviving either the third bugnest or the Astral Islands are both too low.” The cultivator shook his head as he stood there.

After he made his choice, quite a few other cultivators began to make their choices as well. Most cultivators chose the third, fourth, or fifth options.

“Master, what should we do? What choice should we make?” Su Youji sent mentally.

“I’m choosing the fifth option,” Ning replied mentally. “You?”

This was the only choice Ning could make. There was no way he would choose the first three options, because he had to make it to Vastheaven Palace within a single chaos cycle! He’d only be allowed to leave after becoming a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom. There was no way Ning could waste time mining, and there was obviously no way he would be willing to become another’s slave. He also didn’t have the ability to become a Samsara Daolord right away.

As for the bugnest, that was purely a matter of luck. Ning absolutely wouldn’t leave his own destiny up to luck. In the end, he was more confident in his own abilities.

“The fifth option?” Su Youji hesitated momentarily. “Then I will choose the fifth option as well.”

“No need to push yourself that hard. This is a life-altering decision. Choose whichever option suits you the most,” Ning said.

“I choose the fifth option.” Su Youji gritted her teeth. “I know that I’m fairly weak, but with those bugbeasts you loaned me I should be able to hold my own. I’m unwilling to choose any of the other options.”



Ning nodded. As he saw it, most likely many of the cultivators would elect to choose the fifth option. Most of them would rather battle against other cultivators of the same level than to waste countless years of their life, become an eternal slave, or put everything up to luck.

Ning suddenly produced a bracelet then handed it to Su Youji. "Youji, this holds those eighteen Hellwind Golems. They won't be of much use to me, but if you use them and your fifty-one bugbeasts you should have at least some chance of surviving this Astral Islands. I've already ordered the Hellwind Golems to obey you in all things. You'll easily be able to bind them."

"Master, they will be of help to you." Su Youji began to grow nervous. She knew exactly how dangerous the fifth option would be, given that only one in a hundred would survive. Even special lifeforms would be taking part!

"Just take it," Ning repeated.

Su Youji stared at the white-robed youth. At first, she had only elected to become Ji Ning's retainer because of how monstrously talented he was. However, after the two spent more time together she slowly began to understand what type of a person Ji Ning truly was. Ji Ning looked peaceful and relaxed, but he wouldn't readily acknowledge others. Once he did, however, he truly would treat that person as a lifelong friend.

Su Youji had always sensed that something was perpetually weighing on Ji Ning's mind. She had tried to explore this topic but had never been able to make any progress.

"Let's go." Ning placed the bracelet in Su Youji's hands, then strode towards the fifth option's region. Su Youji nodded, following by his side.

More than thirty thousand cultivators and thousands of special lifeforms. Each made their own choices.

What truly surprised Ning was that twenty-three cultivators and two special lifeforms actually chose the second option. It must be understood that this was everyone's first visit to this place. No one knew any of the local Samsara Daolords, which meant choosing the second option

represented choosing to become a slave.

“Anything really can happen, I suppose,” Ning mused.

There were benefits to becoming a slave as well. You would become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom, albeit one of the lowest-tier members, and would gain at least a modicum of access to the Brightshore Kingdom’s secrets.

The third option, mining. More than a thousand cultivators and a hundred special lifeforms chose this option.

The fourth option, surviving the bugnest. More than five thousand cultivators and two hundred special lifeforms chose this option.

The fifth option, surviving the Astral Islands. All the remaining individuals chose this option.

# Chapter 27: Six Strata

Those who chose the other options were all escorted off by the four black-armored retainers. As for those who chose to attempt the Astral Islands, they were escorted by the silver-armored duo.

Actually, it wasn't really 'escorting'. They were simply dragged straight into an estate-treasure.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

The silver-armored man and woman flew off the mountain peak and towards a different part of the Brightshore Kingdom. They physically flew because it was impossible to teleport within the Brightshore Kingdom; flying was the only option! The flight would take quite a few days.

The eleventh day of their journey.

"Eh? I sense a disturbance." Ji Ning and thirty thousand-plus cultivators and special lifeforms were still within the estate-world. Ning could suddenly sense that his three Mirrorsnow Paintings were resonating with something far off in the distance. "Is there another Mirrorsnow Painting within the Brightshore Kingdom? I wonder if this is the one I need."

After the silver-armored duo flew past this region, a strange alien lifeform with green reptilian skin suddenly emerged from the waters of the lake below. The creature raised his head to stare towards the skies, locating the silver-armored duo which was now billions of kilometers away. When the creature saw the silver armor, his face changed. "Was that a Mirrorsnow Painting? Those two major powers come from the Twelve Palaces. It should be carried by one of the World-level cultivators they abducted and are now escorting. Damn. I've already left the Astral Islands. There's no way back."

.....

Although Ning could sense the Mirrorsnow Painting, there was nothing he could do. In the end, they all spent more than a month and a half in the estate-world.

Whoosh.

Suddenly, all the cultivators and special lifeforms were teleported out of the estate-world.

“Where am I?” Ning and the others all stared curiously at their surroundings.

Before them was an enormous dark abyss that devoured all light, making it impossible for any of them to see to the bottom of this abyss.

Directly above the abyss hovered a series of islands, each of which was merely three hundred meters or so in size. There were hundreds of thousands of these levitating islands! The dense cluster hung there in midair, continuously swiveling as they did so. Some were higher in the air than the others.

The bottom stratum held more than 99% of the islands. Ning estimated that there had to be more than three hundred thousand islands there!

The second stratum held roughly twenty thousand islands.

The third stratum held three thousand islands.

The fourth stratum held a hundred islands.

The fifth stratum held merely twelve islands.

The sixth stratum was the highest stratum, and it held only a single island!

“These are the Astral Islands.” The silver-armored man pointed at the levitating islands. “Every single Astral Island has a World-level cultivator!”

“Every one?” Ning could hear the others all murmuring. That meant more than three hundred thousand World-level cultivators were gathered here.

“The cultivators of the Astral Islands can only be promoted when they challenge cultivators on the same stratum or a higher stratum,” the silver-armored man said. “If you can gain ten consecutive victories against someone of the same level as you, you’ll be promoted to the next higher island. Win ten more times in a row, and you’ll be promoted once again. If

you lose so much as a single fight... if you are lucky you will survive, but you'll still be demoted by one level."

Everyone's faces turned pale.

Ning stared at the levitating islands. He finally understood what these levitating islands truly represented. The only island on the sixth stratum held a cultivator who had defeated at least ten of the cultivators on the fifth stratum before advancing to the sixth stratum. After doing so... others might challenge him, but he would have no one else to challenge.

"Dare I ask, what must we do to become citizens of the Brightshore Kingdom?" A cultivator spoke out right away.

"Don't be impatient." The silver-armored man smiled. "Choosing the Astral Islands was actually the best choice. Those who chose to become slaves have lost their futures, while those who went into the mines shall be there for a thousand chaos cycles. I'm amazed anyone would even consider those two choices. I really wonder what the hell they were thinking. As for those who chose the bugbeast nests... they probably doubted themselves and their level of strength, which was why they chose to test their luck."

The silver-armored man looked at them. "All of you here, however, possess self-confidence and determination. You chose the path that has a 1% rate of survival."

The silver-armored man continued, "You'll engage in multiple duels here on the Astral Islands. If you want to become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom, the answer is actually quite a simple one. So long as you can acquire a complete legacy, you'll become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom."

"Acquire a complete legacy?" All of the cultivators and special lifeforms present were puzzled.

"Right. Each time you defeat a foe on the Astral Islands, you'll gain a legacy heirloom which they possess," The silver-armored man said. "For example, a legacy created by a powerful Heartforce Cultivator might have been spread across 3600 legacy treasures. If you can gain all 3600 pieces

and piece together the complete legacy, you'll be able to become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom."

"A heartforce legacy?" Everyone present, Ning included, was shaken and excited.

How could a legacy described as something created by a 'powerful Heartforce cultivator' by this mighty Daolord possibly be a simple one? It must be understood that there were a number of Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals who were skilled in heartforce, but there were very few World-level cultivators of heartforce. As for Samsara Daolords who possessed heartforce? They were even more rare.

"Naturally. But of course, any such heartforce legacy would be spread across 3600 different treasures. This would be considered one of the most truly top-tier legacies. There are many other legacies that are merely spread out across a thousand legacy treasures. There are also some that are spread across five hundred or two hundred treasures. Once you reach the Astral Islands, you'll easily be able to detect which legacy treasure is located on which island, and you can go challenge the person who has what you want. But of course, that's only if you are qualified to request the duel. The sole cultivator on the sixth stratum, for example, isn't qualified to challenge anyone. He has to wait for others to challenge him.

"In short! If you can piece together a complete legacy, you can request permission to leave and become a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom. If you piece together two complete legacies, you absolutely must depart."

The silver-armored man suddenly laughed. "But of course, you can always do what that person on the sixth stratum has done. He acquired a complete legacy, lost a few pieces of it on purpose, then won a second complete legacy, then lost a few more pieces of it... and as a result, he slowly built up a library of eight different legacies."

"What?"

"You can do that?"

Ning and the others were instantly rendered speechless.

If you pieced together one legacy, you could leave. If you pieced together two, you had to leave. There was actually a loophole?!

“The Astral Islands hold a total of ninety-nine mighty legacies, all of which are incredibly powerful.” The silver-armored man laughed. “It is incredibly hard for ordinary citizens of the Brightshore Kingdom to gain access to such powerful legacies. However, ninety-nine priceless legacies are present here at the Astral Islands. Unfortunately, they are spread across many different treasures. If you are strong enough, go forth and defeat the other cultivators and seize their treasures.”

The silver-armored man continued, “Remember this! Every day, you are only permitted to engage in a single duel. If you go a full month without a single legacy treasure to your name, you will be put to death. Thus, there’s no way you can avoid battle and just relax.”

Ning and the others immediately understood.

The losers would have their legacy treasures be seized! If they didn’t have so much as a single legacy treasure, the other cultivators wouldn’t even bother with them, resulting in them living unmolested lives. However... the Brightshore Kingdom did not wish for this to happen. If you didn’t have so much as a single legacy treasure for more than a month, you would perish!

The Brightshore Kingdom would put you to death!

The other World-level cultivators would also try to kill you!

The closer you got to acquiring a full legacy treasure set, the more difficult things would become. For example, if you had 199 legacy treasures and needed just one more, other cultivators might take an interest in you and try to kill you and take everything you had.

“Those who wish to try for the truly top-tier legacies will have an even higher chance of death. Those who go for somewhat weaker legacies will have lower casualties.” Ning understood this principle.

“This is a place of both great danger as well as great opportunity. Ninety-nine legacies! Haha, in the Endless Territories you’d risk your life

countless times over without getting a chance at such a legacy. Here, every single one of you has a chance! In fact, you can do the same thing which this guy is doing?” The silver-robed man pointed at the the cultivator on the sixth level. “This one has already pieced together eight legacies. If you are strong enough, you can do the same.”

“But of course, you’ll need to be careful as well. Don’t end up dying.” The silver-armored man suddenly raised his voice. “Old fellow, create another 31091 astral islands.”

“Mm.” A deep voice rang out from within the dark abyss.

Boom! Boom! Boom! A series of stars began to suddenly arise from within that pitch-black abyss.



# Chapter 28: Arrival

Ji Ning and the others flew past the various astral islands.

“Go.” The silver-armored man waved his hand, sending out an awe-inspiring blast of power that pushed at every single World-level cultivator. Even someone like Ning felt that this surge of power was nigh irresistible.

Ning followed that surge of power, allowing it to carry him forward as he flew towards the closest astral island.

“Master.” Su Youji’s voice rang out in Ning’s mind.

Ning turned to look at her.

Su Youji was far off in the distance. She had flown towards an astral island as well, but she was staring at Ning.

“Be careful,” Ning sent mentally.

“You too.” Su Youji had a look of longing in her eyes.

Ning couldn’t help but sigh mentally. There was nothing he could do. Once they had chosen to challenge the trial of the Astral Islands, every single cultivator would have to fend for themselves. There was simply no way for him to continue to protect Su Youji. He’d done everything he could. The rest was up to her now.

The various cultivators and special lifeforms all flew to their own islands, which then quickly descended to the lowest tier of islands. As for the silver-armored man and woman, the two simply watched from afar.

“Although the Hegemon didn’t grab that many people from the Endless Territories this time, he still managed to grab a few who have incredible talent and potential.” The silver-armored woman smiled.

“Mm.” The silver-armored man nodded.

The Brightshore Kingdom was one of the most mysterious and powerful organizations in the Endless Territories. It naturally had its own territory where its countless denizens dwelled, and it had its own World-level cultivators which it reared.

However, every so often the almighty Hegemon would abduct promising figures from throughout the Endless Territories. Generally speaking, he wouldn't grab too many people, less than a hundred thousand. Compared to the vastness of the Endless Territories, this was a fairly small sum and so the other major powers were willing to tolerate his actions. Nobody wished to make an enemy of the Hegemon over something as minor as this.

"How many do you think will be able to make it onto the fifth or sixth levels?" The silver-armored woman asked.

"The fifth level? I'm guessing ten! As for the sixth... that's hard to say. It's possible that none of them will make it." The silver-armored man's gaze turned towards the very apex of the hundreds of thousands of astral islands, at that single solitary island that sat atop the sixth level. "Bertulu... I wonder which of our Twelve Palaces he will end up choosing."

"Most likely it'll be the Palace of the Heart or the Palace of Radiance." The silver-armored woman sighed. "It has been a long, long time since our Brightshore Kingdom has encountered a peerless genius like him. He was originally just a rather intriguing special lifeform. Who would've thought that he would actually become the equal of the Ancient cultivators?"

"Right. The first time I saw Bertulu, I took him for an Ancient cultivator as well." The silver-armored man let out a sigh. "What a dazzling figure! Even the Hegemon is paying attention to him. The Heart Palace and the Radiant Palace are fighting fiercely over him in secret. Both sides hope that Bertulu will join them."

"Unfortunately, he's not skilled in the sword. If he was, I'd be hoping for him to join our Sword Palace." The silver-armored woman shook her head. "Let's go. Our mission is over."

The two glanced a final time at the sole island on the sixth level, then transformed into twin streaks of light that quickly departed. Both of them knew that Bertulu was capable of breaking through to the Samsara Daolord level whenever he wished. Once he made his breakthrough... even though he would merely be a Daolord of the First Step, he would probably

be just as strong as most Daolords of the Third Step.

If so, he would be every bit a match for the two of them. Even the Hegemon was paying attention to this peerless genius. The two of them viewed him as they would equals.

.....

Ning was walking through his quiet astral island. This island was merely three hundred meters in size, but it had a graceful little residence that was actually decorated with many unique statues. As soon as Ning had landed within this astral island, it had recognized him as its master.

“From this day forth, I’ll be staying here for quite a long period of time.”

With but a thought, Ning willed the residence to change in appearance, making it look like the houses he stayed in back when he had lived on Earth.

He pushed open the door to the home. Inside the home, there was actually a reclining sofa. Ning lay down on the sofa, then casually waved his hand, causing a golden book to appear and fly into Ning’s hands.

This golden book held records regarding the other three hundred thousand-plus islands. Every single cultivator on those islands held a piece of a legacy!

This book also contained an explanation regarding the ninety-nine precious legacies that were here.

“The number one legacy is the heartforce legacy, a legacy which was created by a Heartforce Cultivator who had reached the Verge of the Daomerge, Daolord Featherdress. This heartforce legacy is mysterious but very powerful. Every single Heartforce Cultivator stands at the very apex of power amongst cultivators of the same level. Daolord Featherdress was once the most powerful Daolord in all the Endless Territories! Alas, he failed his Daomerge. Before dying, he slew an Eternal Emperor... and this legacy is just as valuable as the legacy of an Eternal Emperor’s! It has been separated into 3600 parts. If you gather the 3600 legacy treasures and merge them together, you shall gain access to this legacy.”

“The number two legacy is the spacetime legacy, a legacy left behind by the almighty Hegemon himself. Although this is merely the first chapter of the full technique, it will be enough to allow you to roam the Endless Territories without fear. It has been scattered across 1800 different legacy treasures. If you gather all 1800 legacy treasures, you can gain this legacy.”

“The number three legacy...”

There was a detailed ranking of all ninety-nine legacies.

The most powerful legacies required a total of 3600 legacy treasures.

The weakest legacies merely required a hundred legacy treasures.

Although Ning was intrigued by quite a few of them, he still shook his head privately. “As expected, this is merely a place for weeding out weak World-level cultivators. The most powerful legacies of the Brightshore Kingdom are not here.”

The number two legacy had been left behind by the almighty Hegemon. If this was the complete legacy, it would be an absolutely incredible boon... but alas, it was merely the first chapter.

Ninety-nine legacies in total. The Hegemon had only left behind the number two legacy. The other ninety-eight came from various Daolords. The legacies of a Daolord and the legacies of an Eternal Emperor were completely different things.

The likes of Daolord Featherdress or Daolord Allgod were incredibly powerful, capable of matching or even exceeding Eternal Emperors. However, every single Eternal Emperor was at least on their general level, and some were even more powerful.

By comparison, the four paintings and legacies of Emperor Mirrorsnow were more valuable than these ninety-nine legacies.

That number one legacy, the heartforce legacy, is quite valuable though. I imagine that one is on par with Emperor Mirrorsnow’s legacy.” Ning carefully read through the entire book.

Ning wanted sword-arts, and there were two types available. One was

ranked nineteen, the other ranked seventy-three! Both had been left behind by Daolords.

“If I have the chance, I really do need to try and acquire the fourth Mirrorsnow Painting. As for these sword-arts here? I should try to use them to validate and test my own sword-arts. It should be of some benefit, at least.” Ning had long ago found his own path and understanding regarding the sword.

As Ning saw it, the more sword-arts the better. He had studied more than five thousand sword-arts in the Hall of Swords in the Allgod Estate, after all.

“Eh?” Ning’s eyes suddenly lit up.

“This one seems to be... not bad at all!” On his second careful reading, Ning’s gaze fell upon the ninth-ranked legacy.

The ninth-ranked legacy was the footwork legacy. This was a footwork technique meant for close combat which had been left behind by an unknown major power who had gained certain special insights over lightning.

At first, Ning hadn’t paid it much attention as he had focused on searching for heartforce techniques and sword-arts. However, on his second careful read-through he realized how extraordinary this ninth-ranked legacy was.

For a footwork technique to be ranked number nine was extraordinary, in and of itself. This was also a technique that was devised based on lightning. Ning trained in the [Novessence Thunder] and was fairly familiar with lightning; most likely, he would be a good fit for this footwork legacy.

“In battle, I currently rely on my sword-arts and just use my the Thunderlight Wings for support. I don’t have any actual, decent footwork techniques.” After carefully reading through the book, Ning made up his mind. His first target would be the ninth-ranked footwork technique!

.....

“A newbie?”

“So many newbies.”

As Ning and the other World-level cultivators flew towards the astral islands, the many newly created islands began to descend towards the bottom stratum of islands. This naturally attracted the attention of the hundreds of thousands of World-level cultivators who were already present.

These cultivators stood atop their own astral islands, watching from afar. Some began to scan their golden books to gain some basic insights into these newcomers. Each golden book recorded rudimentary information regarding the cultivators on each island and the legacy treasures they possessed.

“I’ll wager these newbies are carrying plenty of chaos nectar and treasures.”

“Let’s see what we can take from them.”

“Challenge issued.”

“Challenge issued.”

Many of the more powerful cultivators were intrigued. The weak ones in their group had been plundered long ago, with some having lost all their magic treasures! These newly arrived cultivators, however, would definitely have quite a few treasures on them.

Life in the Brightshore Kingdom was the same as life anywhere else. If you wanted to live, you’d need treasures.

“I need to issue a challenge right away.” There were some cultivators who were extremely powerful but who had lost their treasures to even more powerful cultivators. These people immediately began to issue challenges, as they were in desperate need of treasures! They naturally chose to go after the newcomers.

“A challenge? A challenge from the third stratum?” Ning was relaxing on his sofa, flipping through the information pertaining to the ninety-nine

legacies when he suddenly received a challenge notification.

# Chapter 29: The First Battle

“It seems a lot of people are interested in newcomers like myself.” Ji Ning was in no rush. Instead of answering, he continued to wait patiently as more and more challenges began to accumulate. One... two... three.. four... five...

Apparently, quite a few people were interested in challenging Ning!

In the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning received one challenge from the third stratum, two challenges from the second stratum, and twelve challenges from the bottom stratum!

“A total of fifteen World-level cultivators have challenged me,” Ning mused. Per the rules of this place, each World-level cultivator could only issue one challenge each day! Ning was permitted to challenge a different World-level cultivator as well, but if they didn’t accept... Ning would have to choose from one of the fifteen challengers. He would have to accept at least one challenge.

In truth, to be challenged by so many people at once was actually quite rare. The only reason why there were so many challenges was because everyone knew that Ji Ning and the others had to be carrying many treasures on them.

Normally, it was entirely possible that days would pass between challenges!

“Who should I choose? The Astral Islands are divided up into six strata. The third stratum is neither high nor low... and there are more than three thousand cultivators on that level. I’ll go with this guy.” Ning’s talent made him bold. Weaker new arrivals would most likely choose someone on the first floor as their first opponent.

Through the golden book, Ning willed for his opponent’s message of challenge to be shattered. This represented him accepting the challenge!

There were more than three thousand islands hovering within the third stratum. Within one of those astral islands.



“He accepted? He actually accepted my challenge?” The chubby youth instantly jumped to his feet, a look of wild joy on his face. “Ahahaha, he actually accepted? This is great. It seems that things are finally turning around for me, Pillsaint. Has my luck finally arrived?”

The man known as Pillsaint was the type of person who simply couldn't hide or disguise his emotions.

“I'm a venerable master of the Dao of Alchemy, but my alchemical prowess is completely useless here. Instead, I have to battle against all these other World-level cultivators.” The chubby youth muttered to himself as he walked towards a room. He pushed the door open, then entered. The walls of this room were covered with many divine runes. Upon entering the room, you would also be entering this powerful formation.

Rumble...

Space began to twist and distort, with World God Pillsaint disappearing into thin air.

.....

This island was a beautiful one that was covered with a layer of frost and snow. The entire island was completely silent.

Whoosh.

A pudgy youth suddenly appeared out of nowhere. He glanced at his surroundings, noticing that the entire island was covered with a layer of silvery snow. He was able to see everything quite clearly, and he was quite satisfied. “This battleground is a good one. The scenery is nice, at least. Way better than the last one.”

“It seems my luck really is turning.” World God Pillsaint lay down on the snow, half-closing his eyes as he relaxed. “I don't have many legacies left, but those damnable cultivators on the fourth level keep on coming to rob me of what I have. I hope my luck takes a turn for the better for once. Hopefully this guy will have at least an Eternal weapon. If I can get an Eternal weapon, I'll become much more powerful and be capable of giving

those fellows on the fourth level a good fight. I might even be able to acquire a complete legacy.”

Previously, he had been trying to collect the ninety-sixth legacy, a legacy which was scattered across a hundred legacy treasures. He had gained a total of ninety-one pieces, but a damnable cultivator on the fourth level had issued him a challenge. Pillsaint had hurriedly issued a challenge of his own to a cultivator on the second stratum. If that cultivator had accepted, then there would’ve been no need for Pillsaint to battle the cultivator from the fourth stratum.

Alas, the cultivator from the second stratum had declined to do battle.

Pillsaint had no other options. He had to accept the challenge from the fourth stratum.

The results of that battle were... he lost. His legacy treasures were stripped from him! He had worked so hard for so long, but it all instantly went up in smoke. He had damn near gone mad.

Whoosh.

Space twisted once more.

Ji Ning appeared atop this icy island. As he glanced at the scenery, Ning couldn’t help but smile very slightly. He also noticed the pudgy youth who was sleeping on the snowy ground not too far away from him.

Swoosh. The chubby youth rose to his feet and stared at Ning, a scorching look in his eyes. “Fellow Daoist, you have an extraordinary demeanor. I imagine you must be carrying valuable treasures.”

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

The chubby youth’s eyes instantly lit up as he grew even more excited. “Eternal treasures?”

“Yes.” Ning laughed and nodded. Hundreds of thousands of World-level cultivators were here, and most likely a good number of them held Eternal weapons. Ning couldn’t bother to hide the fact that he had one of his own. A weak person who had an Eternal weapon might become a target, but

Ning was strong enough that he had nothing to fear.

“Ehehe. Treasures belong to the strong, you know. It would be wasted in your hands.” The pudgy youth’s aura suddenly blasted forth as he manifested a total of six arms. He now wielded six black hammers in his hands. “Hurry up and hand it over, and I’ll spare your life if you do.”

For some reason, Ning couldn’t help but have a good feeling about this pudgy youth. He almost felt as though he was looking at an infant. This pudgy youth wore his heart on his sleeve, his emotions on display for anyone to see. He didn’t seem to have any evil intentions at all and appeared to be a valiant man.

However, Ning suddenly felt a twinge of fear.

How could he possibly treat any World-level cultivator as he would a child? For Ning to feel kindly disposed to him without even realizing it... it was possible that this was because this cultivator truly was a good man, but it was also possible that he had trained in some sort of mesmerizing technique.

“Then let’s see what you have.” Ning held a Violetjewel in each of his two hands. Here on the Astral Islands, even a battle against someone weaker had to be taken seriously.

Although two swords wasn’t the full extent of Ning’s power, it was enough for Ning to generate a truly airtight defense.

“Eat a hammer!” The pudgy youth charged forwards, the great warhammer in his hands transforming into a streak of light that caused space to collapse in on itself. The power of this blow was so great that even Ning couldn’t help but feel speechless.

A supreme World God? It seemed he was actually more than just that!

BOOM! Ning released a seemingly simple sword-strike that struck directly against the great warhammer that was slamming down towards him. Warhammers were weapons well-suited for heavy smashing blows, and to use sword-arts in a head-on clash against a warhammer was indeed a foolish decision. However, Ning held tremendous confidence in his own

strength. It was highly unlikely that he would find anyone in the World level who could overcome him in raw physical power... and if Ning DID encounter some a powerful freak that was even stronger than him, Ning would run away as fast as he could.

As expected, this casual strike from Ning was enough to send his opponent staggering backwards.

“How can this be?!” A dazed look appeared on the pudgy youth’s face as he stared at Ning. “I just wanted to fight a newbie. Why the hell did I run into such a strong one?”

“No way. I don’t believe this.” The pudgy youth once more charged forwards, his six warhammers shattering the heavens as they came smashing down towards Ning once more.

Ning couldn’t help but sigh upon seeing this.

His opponent was most likely a supreme World God, and his awe-inspiring hammer-arts were mighty and difficult to defend against. However, there was a flaw to this type of an attack, which used overwhelming raw power and space itself to crush down upon one’s foes. The flaw was... if your foe could withstand your attacks, you would be finished.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Ning showed no mercy at all, striking out three times in quick succession. The first strike knocked the youth backwards, the second caused him to stumble as he frantically defended. When Pillsaint fell down to the ground, a huge crater appeared in the ground beneath him.

When Ning’s third sword slammed into the opponent, the pudgy youth vomited out a mouthful of blood.

“Give up?” Ning pointed at his foe with his sword.

“You are way too strong. Even on the fourth floor, only those freaks who once made it to the fifth floor would be a match for you.” The pudgy youth lay there within his crater, somewhat dazed. “Why is my luck so shitty? More than thirty thousand newbies, and I have to pick a freak who is

strong enough to make it to the fifth stratum.”

Ning was intrigued upon hearing this. He didn't know how strong the various experts on the Astral Islands were, but his opponent had clearly been here for quite some time and knew many things.

“There's only a few freaks like him, but I just had to run into one.” The pudgy youth shook his head, then looked at Ning. He said hurriedly, “Can you please not take away my warhammers? They are just Dao weapons.”

“Dao weapons?” Ning was secretly surprised. The youth had been able to unleash the power of a supreme World God while using mere Dao weapons? This fellow was incredibly strong, much more powerful than God Emperor Blacklotus had been! If he was using an Eternal weapon... didn't that mean he would have the power of a transcendent World God?

“I'm telling the truth. See for yourself!” The pudgy youth said hurriedly, “You can send out your divine sense and scan any of the treasures I'm carrying inside of me. Ugh, I've been robbed of all of my chaos nectar. All I have left are these six hammers...”

Although he had encountered a few people who were slightly stronger than him, they generally wouldn't go too far. If they did, World God Pillsaint would've gone all-out. To kill a powerful World God was a very difficult feat; normally, the only option for doing so was to exhaust his store of divine power.

Divine power needed a fairly long period of time in order to recover. However, on the Astral Islands it was possible that one would receive a challenge every single day. If you lost your power, you might well fall victim to the schemes of another.

Thus, unless there was an overwhelming disparity in power, these cultivators generally wouldn't force their foes to go all-out. That was of no benefit to them.

However, Ning was capable of easily slaying his opponent. The difference in power between the two truly was quite great. His foe was merely a supreme World God, whereas Ning was comparable to a Daolord of the First Step.

“All I have are these six hammers.” The pudgy youth stared at Ning. He really was worried that Ning would take those hammers away from him.

# Chapter 30: Three Months

If Ji Ning wished to take his warhammers by force, he would be dramatically weakened. Although he could still go abuse other cultivators on the first stratum and steal a few Dao weapons from them, he had brought those six warhammers with him from the outside world. They were very suitable weapons for him, and it would be quite hard for him to find similarly suitable weapons on those weaker cultivators.

“Are you serious...” Ning swept the man with his godsense. The man didn’t resist at all, allowing Ning to scan him with ease.

“You don’t even have a single bottle of chaos nectar or a single chaos jewel.” Ning shook his head.

“I used to! They took everything from me.” The pudgy youth shook his head. “Nothing I could do. They were stronger than me. I’m just happy I was able to keep my six warhammers. I used to have an Eternal treasure, but that was taken from me as well.”

As he spoke, he looked at Ning in a rather anxious, beseeching manner. “Can you leave my six warhammers alone? Please?”

“Don’t worry. I have no interest in those six warhammers whatsoever,” Ning chuckled. “I just want to ask you a few questions. Also, you have to give me that sword-arts legacy you are holding.”

“Take it.” The pudgy youth immediately tossed a sword-shaped talisman over towards Ning. This was one of the legacy treasures that formed the seventy-third ranked legacy, the sword-arts legacy. Although it was merely ranked seventy-three, it was still divided up into 108 different legacy treasures. You had to acquire the full set in order to gain access to it.

Seeing that Ning didn’t intend to kill him, the pudgy youth hurriedly said, “Ask me whatever you wish. I, Pillsaint, will tell you everything you want to know.”

“Your name is Pillsaint?” Ning asked.

“Yes, Pillsaint. This is the Daoist title which my master gave me. My

master is skilled in alchemy, as am I. Who would've thought that I would be this unlucky? A Daolord had asked me to go help him refine some pills, but halfway on the trip back I was abducted to this place by a different Samsara Daolord, as were the ten World-level cultivators who the first Daolord had sent to invite me." Pillsaint had a resigned look on his face as he spoke.

Ning was shocked upon hearing this. Skilled in Alchemy?

This fellow was capable of unleashing the power of a supreme World God when using mere Dao weapons... and he was actually a master of alchemy? A Daolord had asked him to go refine pills for him? That meant his skill in alchemy had to be incredibly high. Ning knew that the skilled alchemists and pill-refiners of the Endless Territories were incredibly respected.

"Ugh, but so what if I'm good at alchemy? The Brightshore Kingdom doesn't give a damn about me. All I can do is stay here and duel other World-level cultivators." World God Pillsaint said resignedly, "I'm skilled in controlling the empty void of space and am physically strong, but that's just because those are necessary components of pillforging. Right now, all I can do is use my warhammers to battle against other World-level cultivators."

Ning could tell that this World God Pillsaint had to be extremely skilled in the arts of alchemy and had an even more skilled alchemy master. In the outside world, not even ordinary Samsara Daolords would go offend someone of his status.

If Ning could, he would try to find a chance to help this man out. If World God Pillsaint was able to leave this place in the future, Ning could ask him or even his master to help him refine any special pills that he needed.

"Mm. In the future, I'll need to acquire a few extra legacies. If I find any that I don't need, I can just lose a set to him on purpose," Ning mused.

The only legacies Ning himself were interested at present were the sword-arts legacy and the footwork legacy. As for the top-ranked



heartforce legacy, Ning was interested in that as well.

Still, the rules were that those who acquired a complete legacy could leave, but those who acquired two were required to leave.

Thus, if Ning wanted to acquire several different legacies, he would have to lose a few battles on purpose and let his opponents acquire those legacies! Ning was definitely planning on helping out Su Youji, but if he had the chance he would also help this World God Pillsaint as well.

“I wonder which astral island Youji is now on.” There was nothing Ning could do. Only after battling someone could he find out exactly which island a specific cultivator was on. He wanted to help her out, but he currently could not. Only in the future would he be able to try to come up with a way of locating her.

“I ask you this,” Ning said, “Roughly how strong are the cultivators on each island?”

“That’s hard to say, because even the first stratum might hold a few freakishly strong individuals.” World God Pillsaint glanced at Ning, then said hurriedly, “I can just give you a rough estimate of how strong everyone is.”

Ning nodded.

“The astral islands on the first stratum generally hold master-class World-level cultivators as well as a few even weaker cultivators.

“The second stratum holds more formidable cultivators. Some have unique treasures or techniques, such as special spells or powerful golems. Others have reached at least the supreme World-level of power.

“The third stratum is generally where most supreme World-level cultivators reside, or those who possess extremely special techniques. I’m a supreme World God myself, and I’m very physically strong. I’m capable of forcing my opponents to face my attacks head-on, which is my position within the third stratum is quite secure.

“The fourth stratum is generally filled with transcendent World-level cultivators, as well as some of the freakishly strong figures who belonged

to the fifth stratum but who were temporarily beaten down by other cultivators from that stratum.

“The fifth stratum... everyone capable of standing securely within that stratum is an utter monster. Most of them probably have the power of Daolords of the First Step, and many have very unique skills and abilities. Who knows what special skills or trump cards they have up their sleeves? All I know is that I’ve never run into them before. There are only twelve individuals total on the fifth stratum. Eight are special lifeforms while four are cultivators.”

Ning was secretly shocked upon hearing this.

The twelve on the fifth stratum all had the power of Daolords of the First Step? How terrifying. Still, most were special lifeforms. There were certain powerful races that were born with tremendous advantages over normal cultivators!

“There’s only a single cultivator on the sixth stratum. I hear that his name is Bertulu, and that he’s an absolutely freakishly strong figure.” The pudgy youth shook his head. “What a freak! He’s a special lifeform as well. Not even those other freaks on the fifth stratum can beat him. He truly is unfathomably strong.”

“Bertulu?” Ning silently memorized this name.

“Fortunately, there is a rule in the Astral Islands that anyone who makes it to the fifth level will be protected, even if they are temporarily knocked down to a lower level. That’s why the only reason why Bertulu hasn’t completely demolished all of the other freaks.” World God Pillsaint shook his head and sighed.

Ning understood the purpose of this rule. The Astral Islands existed in order to help the Brightshore Kingdom select some of the most powerful World-level cultivators to join its ranks. The three hundred thousand-plus cultivators within the Astral Islands right now included many powerful cultivators which the Brightshore Kingdom had abducted from the outside world, but it also held many cultivators which had emerged from the Brightshore Kingdom’s own territory. Ordinary World-level cultivators

simply couldn't compare to them.

Given how many powerful World-level cultivators were amongst the three hundred thousand, for a few absolute monsters to emerge was normal.

Generally speaking, anyone who could make it to the fifth stratum was a freak in some way. Any such person would be protected by the Astral Islands. Even if other cultivators defeated them, they would at most be permitted to take away their opponents' legacy treasures. It was forbidden to kill them! It was also forbidden to seize any of their other, personal treasures!

But of course, this was just a minor form of protection. Although the Brightshore Kingdom was intrigued by these monsters, it wouldn't necessarily go crazy over them. This was because although they were monsters now, they wouldn't necessarily be monstrously powerful Daolords in the future.

In the Allgod Estate, the formation-spirit of the Ten Thousand Mountains had encountered quite a few freakishly talented figures over countless eons, but the only truly formidable figure to emerge was Daolord Badlands.

But of course, Bertulu was so incredibly, freakishly talented that even the most powerful kingdom in all the Endless Territories, the Brightshore Kingdom, rarely encountered his equal. He had already found his path and was capable of becoming a Samsara Daolord whenever he wished. The way they treated him was naturally different.

"It seems that I should be strong enough to make it to the fifth stratum," Ning mused. "Only by making it to the fifth stratum will I be protected."

Although Ning was confident in his abilities, he wasn't confident in his abilities to defeat Bertulu of the sixth stratum. Bertulu had to have acquired the number one legacy, the heartforce legacy, a long time ago. Cultivators skilled in heartforce were quite terrifying to fight, and Ning wasn't confident in his ability to withstand him.

"I need to seize every moment. The more time passes, the more variables

might appear.”

After this first battle, Ning began to accept one challenge after another. He kept a low-profile as he dueled other cultivators on the first stratum. Some challenged him, others he challenged.

There were also times when no one challenged him and the person he challenged refused. In that case, he had no choice but to wait and rest for a day.

And so, just like that...

Ning ended up spending twelve days before advancing to the second stratum.

After spending another twenty-six days, he advanced to the third stratum.

After spending another fifty-one days, he advanced to the fourth stratum.

Ning didn't encounter any of the freaks who had previously made it to the fifth stratum. Since everyone who had been on the fifth stratum was under protection, it was very rare for other World-level cultivators to challenge them. Thus, those freaks generally spent most of their time meditating on the powerful legacies they had acquired. It was entirely possible for them to spend a century in meditation. Ning's sudden rise to power did attract the attention of two 'protected' World-level cultivators, but those two didn't move to challenge him. Instead, they watched quietly.

# Chapter 31: Full Mastery

Ji Ning took things slowly and steadily. He began to challenge the other cultivators on the fourth level. Out of an abundance of caution, Ning didn't challenge anyone who had made it to the fifth stratum in the past. Ning's plan was to wait until he himself made it to the fifth stratum before challenging them.

Here in the Brightshore Kingdom, a single mistake could result in a cascade of errors. There were many freakishly strong cultivators in the Endless Territories who had ended up perishing midway through their journeys. If he was too arrogant, he would probably join them.

Every single opponent on the fourth stratum was incredibly strong, at least as strong as a transcendent World God. They all had their own special skills, and Ning would spend time after each battle meditating on his experiences.

Within one of the astral islands levitating within the fourth stratum.

There was a strange building here that looked round from the outside but was box-shaped on the inside. This was the finest temporal acceleration treasure which Ning had acquired from Arroyo, a treasure which was far better than the Heavengazer Tower. It could easily maintain a rate of time that was fifty times faster than normal, and if you were willing to use up your Immortal energy it could go up to two hundred times the normal rate! But of course, this would use up an absolutely astonishing amount of energy.

Ning was currently maintaining a rate equivalent to a hundred times the normal rate of time. He was reflecting on his previous battle and the new insights it had brought him, using them to perfect his sword-arts. That last battle had been his sixth battle on the fourth stratum, and he had won it as he had all his previous battles!

Rumble...

While meditating on his sword-arts, Ning was in constant resonance with the infinitely distant prime essence of the sword.

The prime essence of the sword was one of the true essences and sources of the endless primordial chaos. It was where the Dao of the Sword itself originated from! It constantly emanated mysterious ripples pertaining to the Dao of the Sword, allowing cultivators to understand more of itself.

“After cultivating for more than a hundred thousand years, I finally understand.” Ning suddenly smiled.

Rumble...

The towering Dao-tree within his Jindan chaos region had already reached a height of more than 105,000 meters tall. In this instant it once more grew upwards, reaching a height of precisely 108,000 meters tall!

In this moment, power began to flow throughout his entire Jindan chaos region, causing it to become even more stable than before.

Boom! Ning’s divine body suddenly transformed into a large number of godgems. Chaos energy flowed through him and transformed into more and more godgems, causing a total of 36,000 godgems to emerge and hover in midair. Moments later, they reconverged to form a single figure, Ji Ning’s figure.

“I’ve seen through and comprehended all the foundational insights regarding the Dao of the Sword. Finally, I have reached the level of full mastery.” Ning was in a superb mood today.

Although it seemed as though Ning had only been cultivating for a few thousand years, if you factored in all the temporal acceleration he had spent more than a hundred thousand years meditating on the Dao of the Sword! When he had emerged from the Allgod Estate, his Dao-tree had already been more than sixty thousand meters tall. He had then engaged in many battles as well as repeatedly dueled the three experts of the sword in the Mirrorsnow Paintings, resulting in Ning’s Dao-tree quickly growing to become more than ninety thousand meters high.

He had spent hundreds of years battling in the Sea of Darkness as well. Although he had spent less than half a year in this place, the temporal

acceleration meant that dozens of years had gone past for Ning. In addition, Ning had been battling against all sorts of powerful World-level cultivators. Thanks to all of these factors, he had finally understood some of the fundamental principles of the prime essence of the sword.

In that instant, he finally understood why it was that this level as known as the level of 'full mastery' and why World Gods at this level were referred to as 'master-class' World Gods.

"Full mastery of the World level... so this is nothing more than the outermost level of understanding the prime essence of the sword." Ning couldn't help but sigh.

The prime essence of the sword...

From it originated the entire Dao of the Sword within the endless primordial chaos. It was naturally unfathomable and profound, and many of its most profound mysteries were actually hidden within the prime essence itself. There was no way to even sense those mysteries, much less meditate on them.

Only the outermost mysteries of the Dao of the Sword which emanated from it like a halo could be meditated on. In recent years, Ning had merely been meditating on those outermost mysteries.

Every single World-level cultivator of the Dao of the Sword would strive hard to comprehend these mysteries. And now... Ning had gained a complete understanding of this outermost layer of the prime essence of the sword!

From this day forth, his Dao-tree would be 108,000 meters tall and his godgems would be 36,000 in number!

From this day forth...

The prime essence of the sword within the endless primordial chaos would no longer be of any use to Ning, because there was no way he could meditate on any of the mysteries that were contained deeper inside of it. Forget about Ji Ning; not even Samsara Daolords or Eternal Emperors were capable of entering the prime essence heart of the endless primordial

chaos. This place was the very core of the entire primordial chaos, a place which cultivators could not possibly enter.

In truth, it wasn't just the Dao of the Sword that existed in that place. All Daos originated from that place!

The prime essence of metal, wood, water, fire, earth, lightning, light, slaughter, the saber, the sword... all prime essences radiated some of its outermost mysteries, allowing cultivators to train in them, but held their deeper mysteries inside of themselves. There was no way those mysteries could be cultivated in at all.

Thus, no matter what path you trained it, you would at most be able to reach the level of full mastery in a fairly easy manner.

Once you gained full mastery...

Your insights would come to an end. You had gained full mastery of what there was to master.

If you wanted to make any further advancements, you would have to rely solely on yourself! In the past, you would be able to continue to attune to the prime essence of a Dao. Now, however, you would have no one to rely on but yourself. You would have to find a unique path belonging to yourself, creating your own Dao out of nowhere and use it to step into the Samsara Daolord level.

Because this Dao would be a completely self-created Dao, this was an incredibly dangerous prospect. The Dao you created might be a heterodox Dao that was wrong. That Dao might allow you to step onto the Samsara Daolord level, but it was entirely possible that soon after embarking on this path your Dao would suddenly crumble, causing you to perish.

This was the reason why it was said that with each step, Samsara Daolords tread the line between life and death! Every single step they took, they would create an ever-deeper level of the Dao for themselves. If the Dao you created was an erroneous Dao, then once you attempted to use it to improve yourself your divine power and truesoul would become to collapse. You would perish.



With each step, they tread the line between life and death. Some would finally reach the Verge of the Daomerge, becoming incredibly powerful figures even amongst their Samsara Daolord fellows. Daolord Solesky was one good example. If his Daomerge succeeded, it meant that his Dao was a perfect one which could gain true eternity. Their path would allow them to live forever within the primordial chaos, with the ravages of time no longer having any effect upon them!

But of course, some of those Daolords on the Verge had incorrect Daos. That did not, however, mean that they were weak. There were some Verge-level Daolords who were capable of battling Eternal Emperors, even though they themselves would never reach that level.

“I previously was able to advance at a rapid pace. Now that I have reached the level of full mastery, I’ll have to find my own path for myself.” Ning understood exactly how difficult it would be for him to find a path that would let him enter the Samsara Daolord level.

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An astral island on the fifth stratum.

“My dear Wildgloom, in the Twelve Palaces our Palace of Thunder is ranked as one of the top palaces. You are quite talented in the Dao of Thunder. If you join our Thunder Palace, your future prospects will definitely be limitless.” An old man dressed in azure armor chortled as he spoke.

Seated facing him was a tall, muscular metallic creature whose entire body was formed by strange metals and wreathed in lightning.

World God Wildgloom was a special lifeform who was born with great power over lightning. He had now reached an incredible level in the Dao of Thunder. Once he became a Samsara Daolord, he would reach even more astonishing heights.

“I can train in thunder in any of the Twelve Palaces of Brightshore.” Wildgloom’s voice was slightly jarring to the ear. “Senior Flameflow, please give me some more time to think this matter through.”

“No rush, no rush.” The azure-armored elder nodded and smiled.

Anyone capable of residing permanently on the fifth stratum was more than strong enough to easily acquire a complete legacy. They could’ve left the astral islands long ago, but most of them were in no rush. There were legacies here, as well as powerful opponents for them to battle against. Most importantly, they still had to decide which palace they were going to join.

The Twelve Palaces of Brightshore were all incredibly powerful, but the best palace would always be the one which suited them the most. They had to decide what their future path would be before deciding on which palace they would join.

“You have my message-talisman. Once you decide, just break it and I’ll come find you.” The silver-armored elder smiled as he rose to his feet. “I won’t disturb you any further.”

World God Wildgloom hurriedly rose to his feet to send his guest off. Although this person had come to invite him, he was still a Samsara Daolord. He was not, however, one of those black-armored Daolords. Those black-armored Daolords were the weakest Daolords.

Whoosh.

The azure-armored Daolord, Daolord Flameflow, flew out of this astral island. He pulled out an enormous book and began to casually flip through it. The members of the Twelve Palaces were permitted to go through the information which the kingdom possessed regarding all of the World-level cultivators here.

“Eh? This fellow has been here less than half a year, but he’s made it to the fourth stratum already? He’s also defeated six consecutive foes on the fourth stratum? He’s undefeated thus far?” As Daolord Flameflow flipped through the pages of the book, he couldn’t help be startled by something he read.

If someone defeated ten foes in a row on the fourth stratum, that person would be promoted to the fifth stratum. This man had defeated six foes in a row without being defeated a single time. Given this, it was very likely

that he would make it to the fifth stratum in the future.

“Skilled in both the sword as well as lightning? His skill in lightning alone allows him to suppress his foes, and he is quite talented in the Dao of Thunder? This guy looks like he would be a great fit for my Thunder Palace. Mm, I should go take a look.” The azure-armored elder quickly decided to go visit this astral island on the fourth stratum. He quickly began to stride through the air as he walked towards that island.

This was, of course, the astral island which Ning was residing on.

# Chapter 32: The Twelve Palaces of Brightshore

Ji Ning was meditating on sword-arts by himself within his astral island, using the top-grade temporal acceleration Dao treasure, the Luminous Room.

Ning was seated in the lotus position. Before him was a table that had a flagon of wine, a scroll of parchment, a brush, and a brush holder. Every so often, he'd pick up the brush and spend a bit of time painting on the scroll.

"The fifth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the Silent World. I still need to spend a bit more time on it." Ning was close to mastering the fifth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, which was the highest level stance which World God Northrest himself had been able to master!

They were both World-level cultivators and had both reached the level of full mastery in the Dao of the Sword, but there were still differences in their sword-arts!

Northrest had only been a supreme World God due to his Eternal weapon, but some of the truly peerless geniuses which the Brightshore Kingdom had abducted and brought to this place were capable of that level of power even when they used mere Dao weapons. Some were even more terrifyingly strong!

This was what a difference in sword-arts could make.

In terms of profundity of sword-arts, there were quite a few people on the Astral Islands who were superior to Ning! Ning himself understood this quite well. In short, he simply hadn't been training for long enough, and he had broken through to the World level just recently. If these people knew that he had reached the level of full mastery a mere thousand years after reaching the World level, they would probably be completely stupefied.

"Others won't care about how long you have been cultivating. They will

only care about how strong you are. My advantage lies in the strength and speed which the azureflower mist energy has imbued me with. It gives me the speed and strength of a Daolord of the First Step! But my weakness is my sword-arts...”

“I need to hurry up and collect a set of the sword-arts legacy. That will be of use to my sword-arts as well,” Ning mused.

Anything referred to as a ‘legacy’ would include extremely detailed, step-by-step instructions for cultivators to use. The [Nameless] sword-art which Ning had acquired was just a fragmentary record; it couldn’t really be referred to as a true legacy.

On the other hand, the many stone sword-steles which World God Northrest had painstakingly erected in order to help his successor better understand the first stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the Heartsword stance, would qualify as a legacy. It contained detailed instructions and provided true guidance to the learner.

It was the legacy which World God Northrest had prepared for his successor.

As for the ninety-nine legacies on the Astral Islands, two of them were sword-arts. However, these sword-arts had been left behind by Samsara Daolords. It must be understood that ever since Ning had left the Three Realms, he hadn’t encountered any formidable Daolord-level experts of the sword who could provide him with tutelage. He had been working hard all by himself.

“Eh?” Ning was suddenly disturbed from his meditations. “Someone came?”

He had bound this astral island long ago and thus was easily able to sense the presence of an outsider.

“Even I am restricted from leaving my astral island. For someone to come to my island means that this is probably a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom.” Ning placed his brush on the brush stand, then immediately left the Luminous Room.

After putting his treasure away, Ning emerged from his private room and then walked into his courtyard where he saw a figure standing outside.

It was an old man dressed in azure armor who had his hands clasped behind his back. As Ning pushed open the doors to his courtyard, the old man turned around and smiled at Ning. "I am Flameflow. I am from the Thunder Palace of the Twelve Palaces."

Ning was startled. This old man was a Samsara Daolord? He immediately said, "Darknorth greets you, senior Flameflow."

"Darknorth?" The azure-armored man nodded slightly, then let out a praising sigh. "My dear Darknorth, you are an impressive figure. Just three months after coming to the Astral Islands, you have already ascended to the fourth stratum, then won six consecutive battles here."

"I'm not quite where I need to be yet. I need ten consecutive victories before I can make it to the fifth stratum," Ning said.

"Generally speaking, the newcomers to the Astral Islands will have to undergo many battles and acquire a few legacies, allowing them to improve and grow before they are able to ascend to the fifth stratum." The azure-armored old man said, "As soon as you came here, you won six battles in a row here on the fourth stratum. I trust that it won't be too hard for you to ascend to the fifth stratum."

Ning understood this as well. There was one particularly valuable part of being here on the Astral Islands: there were many dazzlingly talented cultivators here. In the rest of the Endless Territories, it would be quite hard for Ning to encounter suitable foes. For a transcendent World God to encounter another transcendent World God was an incredibly rare experience.

But here on the Astral Islands, a large number of formidable World-level cultivators had been brought together. It was entirely possible and quite easy for a person to seek out opponents who were roughly on par with him in strength, or perhaps someone slightly stronger or weaker. Since losing a duel might very well result in death, everyone was motivated to

fight to their fullest potential. As a result, all the surviving cultivators were generally able to grow stronger and stronger.

Only by making it to the fifth stratum would you receive protection... but how many would ever be able to ascend to that stratum?

“Please sit, senior.” Ning gestured towards the wooden table and seats nearby. Ning had placed them here, as he often enjoyed sitting down and enjoying some wine as he stared at the many astral islands hovering outside.

Daolord Flameflow sat down.

“Please.” Ning sat down on the other side and helped pour some wine.

“I know you are skilled in lightning,” Daolord Flameflow said.

“You know, senior?” Ning was surprised. Although he had fought quite a few times in the Astral Islands, it was only during his two most recent battles that he had used thunder and lightning. His previous opponents had been so weak that he hadn’t felt the need.

“I have full records of all the battles you engaged in here in the Astral Islands.” Daolord Flameflow chuckled. “Only by watching your battles and learning where your specialties lie shall the Twelve Palaces be in a good position to judge and choose from amongst you.”

“The Twelve Palaces?” Ning was puzzled.

Daolord Flameflow smiled. “You were abducted to this place by the almighty Hegemon, but you probably don’t know much right now. For weaker cultivators, being brought here was a calamity, but for someone like you it is a blessing. The almighty Hegemon... he is an incomparably powerful figure that is one of the few that truly stands at the very apex of the Endless Territories. He has been alive for an extremely long period of time and was the founder of our Brightshore Kingdom.”

Daolord Flameflow asked, “Have you heard of the Dao Alliance?”

“I have.” Ning nodded.

“The Dao Alliance spans an incredibly vast area and virtually all

cultivators belong to the Dao Alliance. Compared to the Dao Alliance, our Brightshore Kingdom is more aloof and more secretive.” Daolord Flameflow said, “The Brightshore Kingdom almost never gets involved in any wars, and so we are on fairly good terms with the Dao Alliance.”

On good terms with the Dao Alliance? Ning let out a sigh of relief. Vastheaven Palace was part of the Dao Alliance; if the Brightshore Kingdom was on bad terms with the Dao Alliance, Ning would’ve been in trouble. But if they were on good terms... why would this almighty Hegemon abduct so many of the World-level cultivators belonging to the Dao Alliance?

“The Brightshore Kingdom is primarily divided up into twelve palaces,” Daolord Flameflow said. “There is also an imperial clan of individuals who are of the same race as the almighty Hegemon. Although they are few in number, they are extremely powerful.”

“They are of the same race as the almighty Hegemon?” Ning suddenly thought back to that enormous, terrifying behemoth that had abducted him to this place.

Of the same race as that behemoth?

“Yes. The members of the imperial clan are extremely few in number, but every single one of them possesses incredible strength and power. But of course, the almighty Hegemon is the mightiest of them all,” Daolord Flameflow said. “The imperial clan rarely shows itself, while the Twelve Palaces of Brightshore comprises virtually all of the cultivators, Aeonians, special lifeforms, and other powerful experts of the Brightshore Kingdom.”

Daolord Flameflow continued, “The Twelve Palaces are very powerful. They are divided into the Palace of the Saber, the Palace of the Sword, the Palace of Radiance, the Palace of Mortality, the Palace of Thunder, the Palace of Flames, the Palace of the Heart, the Palace of Kindwater, the Palace of Woodform, the Palace of Skymetal, the Palace of Deepearth, and the Palace of Spacetime. My palace, the Thunder Palace, holds almost all of the Brightshore Kingdom’s experts in the Dao of Lightning. We have the accumulated legacies of countless generations of lightning-attribute



experts and many Daolords! If you were to join us, you will definitely be able to make great strides on this path.”

Only now did Ning truly understand. At the top of the Brightshore Kingdom stood the Twelve Palaces. As for the almighty Hegemon and the imperial clan... the almighty Hegemon was of course quite powerful, but his imperial clansmen were simply too few in number.

As for the Twelve Palaces, a steady flow of new people would constantly join them. Just look at the cultivators and special lifeforms currently within the Astral Islands. The most skillful members would all be brought into the Twelve Palaces in the future.

“Once you acquire a full legacy, you’ll be qualified to leave this place. If you wish to join the Thunder Palace, you can just shatter this message-talisman of mine.” As Daolord Flameflow spoke, he produced a deep azure talisman that was brimming with flickers of electricity. He handed the talisman straight to Ning. “Once you shatter this, I’ll sense it and immediately come receive you.”

Ning blinked. The Thunder Palace? It was destined that he would walk the path of the Dao of the Sword! His mastery over lightning was far weaker than his mastery of the sword. The entire reason why he had some skill in this area was all thanks to one of the nine secret-arts of Daolord Allgod, the [Novessence Thunder].

Daolord Flameflow continued, “I know that you are also skilled in sword-arts, and I imagine that in the future you shall have to choose between the Sword Palace and the Thunder Palace. None of the Twelve Palaces will give you any pressure; you can choose whichever palace you so desire.”

“Oh, right.” Ning’s eyes suddenly lit up. “Senior, you said just now that you know the results of every battle?”

“Yes. That way, the Twelve Palaces can more easily choose our new members,” Daolord Flameflow said.

“Then have you received word of a female Chaos Immortal who is skilled in the element of fire? She has fifty-one bugbeasts that are comparable to master-class World Gods as well as a full set of eighteen

powerful golems that are also comparable to master-class World Gods.” Ning continued hurriedly, “This is what she looks like. She came here by my side.” As Ning spoke, he waved his finger in the air and caused an image of Su Youji to appear out of nowhere.

“I don’t know what she looks like, but as for a female Chaos Immortal skilled in fire who has bugbeasts and eighteen golems...” Daolord Flameflow laughed. “There is indeed someone amongst the new arrivals who fits these criteria.”

Ning let out a sigh of relief. He found her. Finally, he had found Su Youji!

# Chapter 33: The Tenth Battle

“Female Chaos Immortals are rare to begin with, and ones who specialize in using golems and bugbeasts are even rarer. When you factor in her being skilled the Dao of Fire... yes, there’s only one who fits it all.” Daolord Flameflow looked at Ji Ning. “Is she your Dao-companion?”

“She is my friend,” Ji Ning replied.

“It seems that being your friend is a good thing.” Daolord Flameflow said, “Are you planning to acquire a full legacy, then lose it to her on purpose?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded. Once she acquired a full legacy, she would be able to leave this place.

Daolord Flameflow said, “Then there is something I must tell you in advance.”

“Yes?” Ning looked at the Daolord. Something he needed to know in advance? Was there something wrong with this plan of his? But based on what he had seen thus far, losing on purpose was entirely permitted.

“Being in the Astral Islands is both a curse and a blessing. If your friend is extraordinarily talented, it might be a better idea for you to let her stay here for a while longer. But of course, if she’s weak it would be best for her to leave early on,” Daolord Flameflow said. “My reminder to you is this... even if she manages to survive the Astral Islands, it’ll still be quite hard for her to join the Twelve Palaces.”

“Very hard?” Ning was intrigued.

“Yes.” Daolord Flameflow nodded. “The Twelve Palaces represent the twelve most powerful organizations in the entire Brightshore Kingdom. They recruit Daolords as well as truly talented World-level cultivators who are worthy of further training. It is quite difficult for the many denizens of the Brightshore Kingdom to actually join the Twelve Palaces.”

Daolord Flameflow continued, “There are some, for example, who willingly became slaves of the kingdom. Although they are still considered

our citizens, they stand at the lowest rungs of society. As for those who went to mine for a thousand chaos cycles, they will become citizens upon their return, yes, but do you really think they are qualified to join the Twelve Palaces?” Daolord Flameflow laughed. “Becoming a citizen of the Brightshore Kingdom and joining the Twelve Palaces are two separate matters.”

Ning now understood.

“Take yourself, for example. You have the power to make it into the fifth stratum, which is why I came to give you an invitation.” Daolord Flameflow continued, “Some weaker World-level cultivators might never receive an invitation, even if they do manage to put together a complete legacy. There is a high barrier to entry for the Twelve Palaces, and even the citizens of the Brightshore Kingdom have to undergo many different trials before they are granted entry. But of course, people like you who have received invitations don’t need to go through any further trials.”

Ning nodded.

He understood. However, he still wanted to help Su Youji as quickly as possible. Ning knew exactly what her strengths and limitations were. She had just reached the World level a short while ago, and her insights into the Dao weren’t even as profound as Ning’s, nor was she a battle-hardy World God. She would be able to buy herself some time with her bugbeasts and golems, but as time passed... eventually, she would encounter a truly talented expert and might well lose her life.

“I’d like to ask you, senior, to tell me which astral island she is on,” Ning said.

The golden book included detailed records of every astral island, including basic information about each cultivator and the treasures they held. There was naturally a notation of each location as well.

Generally speaking, the cultivators in the Astral Islands would only learn of each other’s locations through actual combat. But it was only natural for a Samsara Daolord of the Thunder Palace of the Twelve Palaces to know much more.

“The astral island she is on has the address of 399-236,” Daolord Flameflow said.

“So this one over there.” Ning immediately was able to locate the island in question. This astral island was still on the first stratum.

“My young friend Darknorth, I won’t disturb you any further. If you wish to join the Palace of Thunder, simply shatter the talisman and I’ll come welcome you.” Daolord Flameflow rose to his feet.

“Thank you for everything, senior.” Ning felt quite grateful towards the man. If it wasn’t for his help, even he didn’t know how long it would be before he found Su Youji’s astral island.

“A minor matter,” Daolord Flameflow said with a laugh. He then turned and left, disappearing into the skies.

Ning watched silently and pensively as the Daolord left.

“I need to make it to the fifth stratum as soon as possible. I’ll then acquire one of the simpler sword-arts legacies and lose it to Youji right away,” Ning mused to himself. Two sword-arts legacies and one footwork legacy. Ning wanted the footwork legacy the most. Alas, it was highly ranked and hard to acquire. In fact, most of the legacy treasures were with the cultivators on the fifth stratum.

In the coming days, Ning began to issue challenges anew to the other cultivators on his stratum.

The fourth stratum. The seventh battle.

Ning encountered an expert who was skilled in the Dao of Spacetime. This was Ning’s toughest, most grueling battle, because his opponent’s fleeing skills were simply incredible, allowing him to retreat and advance as he pleased.

Ning knew that he had an advantage in actual power, but he was still unable to do anything to his opponent. Even when he used the [Novessence Thunder] to restrain his foe’s movements, his foe’s movements remained unpredictably fast and fluid. In the end, Ning was forced to split his body into two, using two bodies to battle at the same

time. Although each body was weaker than his true body, they were still individually superior than his opponent in strength. Ning wasn't exactly slow. With two bodies surrounding and attacking at the same time, as well as the assistance of the [Novessence Thunder], Ning was able to force his opponent into admitting defeat.

The fourth stratum. The eighth battle.

This battle was against a special lifeform. Special lifeforms were different from ordinary cultivators. Ordinary cultivators were all born from the Worldheart of their chaosworld. Natural-born Elder Gods like Nuwa were said to be born from the primordial chaos, but in reality it was the chaosworld generated by the Worldheart which gave birth to them. They were born with mastery over one of the Heavenly Daos of their chaosworld, but they still emerged from the mysterious, marvelous powers of their Worldheart.

True Gods, Empyrean Gods, mortals... all of them were produced from the Worldheart.

Special lifeforms, however, were truly born within unique situations within the endless primordial chaos. There was a qualitative difference between them and cultivators, and although some of them were weak, others of them were inconceivably strong.

This opponent fighting Ning was an ape-like creature. Just prior to the battle, the creature was crunching his way through a tasty meal of strange, metallic objects. It had a body as tough as a Dao weapon and incredible strength, but it was also extremely intelligent. It had even deeper insights into the Dao than Ning did!

However, in the end it still lost.

This was because Ning was just as strong as it was, but was also much faster! Most importantly of all, Ning was wielding six Eternal weapons while the ape had to rely on its two arms... but to actually kill the ape would be incredibly difficult, because Ning was unable to damage its body. Binding it would also be quite difficult. The only thing Ning could do was force it to admit defeat.

The fourth stratum. The ninth battle.

This was an simple, direct battle. Ning easily gained victory.

“I’ve already won nine battles in a row. One more battle. Just one more win and I’ll have made it into the fifth stratum. Things will be much simpler then.” Ning was feeling rather confident. Thus far, he hadn’t encountered any foes that required him to use his Elementum Waterflame Gourd. That was his final trump card which he would only use when absolutely necessary.

“Next challenge.” Ning sent out yet another challenge to a cultivator on the fourth stratum.

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“He’s won a total of nine victories in a row now.”

One of the twelve astral islands within the fifth stratum.

A skinny, swarthy-skinned child with three eyes dressed with strange silver cape was staring intently at the golden book in his hands. “I hear that the almighty Hegemon personally selected this latest crop of newcomers. It really does seem as though some of them possess tremendous potential. This fellow who won nine battles in a row might not necessarily be powerful, but he definitely has been the fastest mover.”

The golden book only included some basic information regarding the World-level cultivator on each astral island. It didn’t include information such as win-loss totals. Still, it wasn’t too hard to divine such information.

Ji Ning, for example. Ever since he had reached the fourth stratum, he had won every battle he was in. He had gained a number of legacy treasures, while the ones he had defeated had been completely drained of their own legacy treasures! Just by watching the movements of the various legacy treasures, one would easily be able to divine who had won which battles. It was obvious that Ning’s total legacy treasures had increased nine separate times after arriving on the fourth stratum, while there were nine fourth-stratum cultivators who had lost those exact same treasures. Clearly, he had won nine battles in a row.

“Twenty-one of the newcomers have fought their way into the fourth stratum, but eight ended up being pushed back into the third stratum. Some of them managed to fight their way back into the fourth stratum once more. Only five have won every battle they were in. The fastest has won nine battles, while the second fastest has won six.” The skinny, swarthy-skinned child read on. Speed didn’t count for much; the slower ones might just be a bit more cautious.

“It is rare for me to meet a worthy opponent. Mmm... once he wins his tenth battle and makes it into the fifth stratum, I’ll send him a challenge.” A strange smile flashed past the child’s face. “I’ll teach him a thing or two and let him know that there is a heaven beyond the heavens.”

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“Oh? He’s won nine battles?” A black-robed expert on the fourth stratum was flipping through the golden book as well. Although he was on the fourth stratum, it had been a long, long time since anyone had challenged him. This was because he had once made it to the fifth stratum and thus received the protection of the Astral Islands! Making it to the fifth stratum was a testament to his power. Most of his former opponents now knew how strong he was and wouldn’t challenge him without a good reason. As for the newcomers including Ning, few of them would be so rash as to challenge someone under protection.

“Eheh, he’s about to make it to the fifth stratum and receive protection? It won’t be that easy. Not just everyone is worthy of being protected. You might be just one step away... but I will ruin your hopes.”

“You are just one step away, but I’ll let you die in the grips of despair. Just thinking about it excites me. Seeing a genius perish in despair is such a lovely sight.” The black-robed expert let out a chilling laugh as he issued Ning a challenge.



# Chapter 34: Robed Expert

A gentle wind was blowing through the Astral Islands.

Ji Ning was in an excellent mood today. He was flipping through his golden book when his face suddenly changed. “A challenge?”

Ever since he had risen to the fourth stratum, this was the first time someone else on the same stratum had sent him a challenge! The fourth stratum was just a single step away from the fifth stratum, causing everyone to be quite cautious and unwilling to casually start a duel against an unknown cultivator on the same level. They would first gather as much intelligence as possible before deciding whether or not to challenge the newcomer.

“He is actually one of the protected cultivators?” Ning frowned. “There are only around twenty protected cultivators in all the Astral Islands! All of them are unfathomably strong. For him to challenge me...”

“Wait. I’ll wait for a short while.” Ning shut his eyes and began to wait calmly.

Each day, a person could only issue a single challenge. Earlier this day, he had already issued a challenge to another member of the fourth stratum, a cultivator who was not under protection. However, that person wouldn’t necessarily accept his challenge. The higher the stratum, the more cautious cultivators were about dueling people on that stratum.

This was especially true for fourth stratum cultivators who hadn’t received protection!

The closer they were to the fifth stratum and receiving protection, the more cautious they would become. They would generally first defeat some cultivators on the second or third strata, but they wouldn’t kill them. Instead, the fourth stratum cultivator would force these weaker cultivators to swear lifeblood oaths that they would accept any challenges from him, with him swearing that he would not take their lives.

That way, once the fourth stratum cultivator received a challenge from

someone on his level that he didn't wish to fight, he could immediately issue a challenge to those cultivators on the second and third strata, allowing him to avoid the challenge.

It was possible to avoid battles in this way, but unexpected things would sometimes happen as time went on. For example, those second and third strata cultivators might already be engaged in a duel, preventing them from accepting the challenge from the fourth stratum cultivator. This wouldn't be considered a violation of the oath.

Thus, during the past two weeks, Ning had only been able to successfully challenge someone a single time. All his other challenges had been declined.

"I hope this one will go through. Unless absolutely necessary, I'd rather not duel a protected cultivator until I myself receive protection as well," Ning mused.

If he wasn't protected while his opponent was, their mental approach to any duel would be completely different.

Time ticked on minute by minute.

Rumble.

The golden book now displayed some new information. The cultivator which Ning challenged had just entered into a battle against a different individual.

"Another one avoiding battle." Honestly, Ning had expected this outcome. He had only succeeded once in the past half month, after all.

"No choice but to accept the challenge. Time for me to see just how strong these protected individuals are." Through the golden book, Ning was made aware that this individual was a special lifeform, was under protection, and had quite a few legacy treasures. Other than that, Ning knew nothing at all.

Ning reached out through the golden book and shattered the writ of challenge, accepting the challenge. He then immediately walked towards a room filled with many divine runes. Ning stood there in the center of the

room, allowing the formation to be activated and teleport him away.

Rumble...

This was another oceanic island, filled with beauty and grace. Ning appeared atop a small mountain within the island, and he immediately saw the distant, azure-blue waters of the sea as well as the dazzling sands of the beach.

Rumble... another figure suddenly appeared on that same mountain, just a few hundred meters away from Ning. This was a figure that was completely covered in black robes.

Ning looked at his opponent.

The black-robed figure looked back at Ning as well. Only a pair of crimson eyes were visible beneath his dark robes.

“Upon arriving here at the Astral Islands, you immediately ascended to the fourth stratum, then won nine battles in a row.” The black-robed figure’s voice was cold and dark, and his eyes were completely different from the eyes of a cultivator. Those crimson eyes looked even more bizarre and sinister than the eyes of various strange beasts and monsters which Ning had encountered in the past. This was no cultivator. It was a special lifeform.

“Quite impressive. Given enough time, you would definitely be able to ascend to the fifth stratum. Unfortunately, you won’t have that chance.” The black-robed expert laughed, and his laughter was extremely grating and ear-piercing.

“Hahaha... you are just one step away, but you are going to die here. Do you not feel despair? Ahaha...” The black-robed expert laughed wildly, a chaotic aura of fire beginning to emerge from his body. This aura alone was probably capable of driving some weaker cultivators to the brink of insanity.

Ning simply frowned. No enmity existed between the two of them, and yet this man wished to destroy Ning’s future prospects?

“You talk a big game,” Ning said calmly.

Boom! A large black sword suddenly appeared in the black-robed expert's right hand. Although it could be described as a sword, it didn't have any edges to it at all. The aura emanating from this greatsword gave Ning an impression of incredible weight and density.

"Ahahaha, I dare make these claims because I have the power to take your life. You simply haven't been here in the Astral Islands long enough, and you haven't undergone sufficient tempering. There is no place in the outside world which is quite like the Astral Islands, with its many elites and geniuses for you to test yourself against. I think you won't be able to take so much as my very first sword-blow." The black-robed expert let out a bizarre laugh.

"Hmph." Ning's gaze turned sharp, and a crimson-gold lightning seal suddenly appeared on his forehead.

Ning was beginning to get rather irritated by this black-robed expert's words. Screw the talking; he was going to give this person a taste of his [Novessence Thunder] first!

Bang! A crimson-gold streak of lightning shot out with incredible speed, giving the black-robed expert no time to dodge at all. The lightning bolt hammered directly against him, causing his body to tremble slightly. However, he was still able to stand there calmly.

"What powerful lightning. Unfortunately, I'm the wrong person for you to use it against." The black-robed expert completely ignored the [Novessence Thunder], allowing it to crackle and writhe around his body. A few flickers of lightning brushed against some of the nearby boulders, instantly reducing them to dust.

"You can die now." The black-robed expert struck out with his sword.

Ning didn't dare to be too brash. This person knew that he had won nine battles in a row on the fourth stratum, but still dared to make the claim that his very first sword-blow would be too much for Ning to handle. Without a doubt, this strike would be an extraordinary one.

Boom! Once this strike was unleashed, the skies above the oceanic island began to dim. Countless flaming clouds began to gather in the air

above them , and the sword crushed down upon Ning as though it was bringing the might of Heaven and Earth down with it.

The sword came crashing down towards Ning with a feeling of absolute, immeasurable ponderance.

“Allgod stance!” A cold, fierce light flashed through Ning’s eyes as well as he unleashed the most dominating, explosive sword stance he possessed. As Ning’s insights into the sword had risen, his Allgod stance had become increasingly extraordinary as well. It was now able to unleash a truly significant amount of the might of Violetjewel’s quintessence core.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning immediately manifested [Three Heads, Six Arms]. His six swords transformed into six blood-colored wyrms that howled towards the massive world-sword that was crashing down upon him.

BOOM!!! When the first blood-colored wyrm slammed into the greatsword, the blood-colored wyrm was brought to a halt but the greatsword was knocked flying backwards.

“What?!” The black-robed expert let out a startled shout.

“He does have a bit of power. No wonder he bragged so much.” Ning was secretly startled. Thanks to the azureflower mist energy, Ning was as strong as a Daolord of the First Step and far above the vast majority of World-level cultivators. He was also using an Eternal weapon and had unleashed his most powerful sword-stance, a strike which was so powerful that very few were capable of withstanding it.

And yet... that black-robed expert’s greatsword had managed to halt his strike in its tracks! But of course, it had only been able to block Ning’s first strike. Ning had six Eternal weapons he was using!

Although one of the blood-colored wyrms had been destroyed, the other five continued to surge forward towards the black-robed expert.

“How can...” The black-robed expert was absolutely stunned. A blazing crimson warblade appeared in his other hand, a saber that gave off a similar aura of incredible ponderance. He joined his saber and his sword

in front of him, using them to block Ning's attacks.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The five blood wyrms came crashing down with enough power to shake the heavens.

BOOM!

The entire mountain they were on actually collapsed, and the island itself split apart as the ground below the strike was completely caved in. As for the black-robed expert, Ning had already smashed him down into the very bottom of the sea.

Swoosh! Moments later, the black-robed expert came charging out of the waters of the sea. He hovered there in midair, staring at the distant Ji Ning who was standing atop a gray boulder.

"You talked a big game, but you don't have much to back it up." Ning let out a chuckle.

"You...!" The black-robed expert was enraged.

There was a reason for his earlier braggadocio. He was an extremely powerful special lifeform, and despite being at the World level he was completely capable of unleashing a level of power comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step. Given that his two Eternal weapons were also quite suited to him and to unleashing the type of power he specialized in, most fourth stratum foes would never dare to take his blows head on.

That was why he had felt so confident in his abilities! What he didn't realize was that for many years now, the way Ning had fought was by directly crushing his foes with overwhelming power.

"Your swords are quite powerful, and you are just as strong as I am." The black-robed expert's voice began to transform, turning low and gravelly. As for his crimson eyes, they began to be filled with an even more insane look than before. "You are now qualified to see my true form."

Boom!

The area around the black-robed expert suddenly became filled with

endless tendrils of dark-red flames. He was like the god of this world of flames, and his black robes suddenly vanished, revealing the form underneath...

# Chapter 35: A Miserable Victory

It was a humanoid creature whose skin was completely pitch-black. His eyes were crimson red in color, and the way in which he stared at Ji Ning made Ning feel uncomfortable. This pitch-black humanoid's skin suddenly began to crack and split apart, revealing a dim crimson substance beneath the skin.

Pop! Every so often, a piece of that crimson material would suddenly shoot out from beneath his skin, moving vastly beyond the speed of light and causing spacetime around it to twist and distort.

The creature simply stood there, allowing his 'skin' to crack and pop. Every so often, more of that crimson substance would shoot out. Whenever it touched the waters of the ocean, the water would begin to hiss and boil away. Whenever it touched the remnants of the island, the island would shudder and break apart even further.

"You've forced me to reveal my true form, which means you have to die. You are indeed qualified to make it to the fifth stratum, but unfortunately for you... you ran into me." The sable creature spoke in a hoarse voice, and a few flecks of that crimson material flew out from his mouth with each word.

"Aren't you the ugly one," Ning said softly.

"You-!"

The sable creature was both embarrassed and enraged. Cultivators were the true masters of the Endless Territories, after all. They were simply too numerous! Even though he was an incredibly powerful special lifeform, when he was born from the primordial chaos he found himself to be the only member of his race. Thus, he changed his appearance and always wore a black robe, spending his life within the world of cultivators.

As a result, even he himself felt that his true appearance was rather ugly. However, only by revealing his true form was he capable of unleashing his full power. There was nothing else he could do. When normal cultivators insulted him, he wouldn't be that irritated, but the



person who just spoke was a powerful cultivator who was on his general level of power.

“All you can do is flap your mouth. Remember this in your next life. The person who killed you is Sabafey.” The sable creature let out a low growl as he gripped the heavy warblade and the heavy greatsword with his hands.

“What an ugly name as well.” Ning was intentionally mocking him. He could tell that this special lifeform had a fairly weak Dao-heart.

“Die.” Two sonorous streaks of saber-light and sword-light struck out, carrying an aura of incredible majesty and power.

“Hmph.” Ning once more manifested three heads and six arms, using his six Eternal weapons fight back.

“Eh? What’s this?” When Ning transformed into a streak of lightning and charged forward, he immediately sensed spacetime twisting around him. This had an impact on even his own agility and movements. Clearly, this Sabafey was capable of causing spacetime to twist all around him in a domain-type maneuver.

“Hmph.” Ning let out an angry snort as that streak of crimson-gold lightning once more blasted out of his forehead. The lightning was shaped like a Flood Dragon as it struck out, but once it moved closer to that black humanoid, it was impacted by some of the crimson substance spurting out of its cracked skin. The crimson-gold lightning instantly began to tremble.

“We haven’t even clashed yet, but that crimson substance shooting out of his body and this domain around him is already having an impact on my abilities. So this is the power of his true form?” Ning was secretly nervous.

Boom!

Boom!

A streak of black light suddenly shot out. This was the sable freak, Sabafey!

A streak of lightning shot out as well. This was the three-headed, six-armed, white-robed Ji Ning. Crimson-gold lightning continuously shot out of Ning's forehead.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The two instantly clashed multiple times in midair, causing the air around them to tremble, the fragments of the island beneath them to sink deeper into the sea, and tremendous tidal waves to arise.

The two of them battled in a wild orgy of destruction, and Ji Ning was clearly at a disadvantage in this fight.

“Damn.”

Ning was forced to repeatedly dodge backwards, then charge forward once more. As for the black freak Sabafey, he fought in an utterly dominating fashion. Although he only had a single warblade and a single greatsword, his strength and savagery was enough to allow his two weapons to completely overwhelm Ji Ning.

In fact, the unique spacetime domain surrounding this creature was enough to make him superior to Ning in speed as well.

“So his true form makes him this much stronger than before.” Ning could feel how difficult this battle was becoming. The power of every single blow from the enemy's sword and saber was superior to Ning's power. Even though Ning had six weapons to his foe's two, he was still at a marked disadvantage in this fight.

In truth, this special lifeform was indeed as physically strong as a Daolord of the First Step. He was on par with Ji Ning, and his insights into the Dao were even more profound than Ning's. This was the reason why the power of his every blow exceeded Ning's power.

As for their earlier clash? Before revealing his true form and unleashing his full power, he looked just like an ordinary cultivator dressed in black robes. He had only been able to unleash roughly ten or twenty percent of his maximum power in that state, which was why his full-strength blow was merely on par with one of Ning's sword-strikes. Things were

completely different now.

“You are definitely going to die. You are gonna die!” Sabafey’s hoarse, maddened voice rang out. He held an advantage in both speed and power!

This was the first time since arriving at the Astral Islands that Ning had been in such a terrible situation. He was being completely dominated.

This was someone who was just as fast and as strong as him, but who also had an even higher level of insight into the Dao. Sabafey had been training here at the Astral Islands for an extremely long period of time, and he possessed that strange domain which was even stronger than Ning’s [Novessence Thunder].

Ning was being crushed.

As the saying goes, if you always stay on the defensive, sooner or later you will lose. Ning no longer dared to let things continue like this.

“Come out!” Ning was furious as well. This Sabafey really was trying to kill him and sever his path.

Whoosh!

A black-crimson gourd suddenly appeared out of nowhere next to Ning. This was the Elementum Waterflame Gourd! The gourd hovered behind Ning, then instantly spat out two streaks of dragon-shaped lightning. One streak of lightning was the Watersmoke Lightning, and it looked a flood of black water descending from an enormous stormcloud. The power of this lightning was so tremendous that it alone was superior to Ning’s [Novessence Thunder]. As for the second streak of lightning, it looked like a cloud of flame and was just as strong as the first streak of lightning.

Two streaks of lightning. The first was Watersmoke Lightning, the second was Firecloud lightning. Fire and water were incompatible by nature! They were opposing forces! But these two streaks of Dao lightning simultaneously coiled around each other as they thundered towards the sable freak, Sabafey.

“What is that?!” The sable creature was shocked.

BOOM! BOOM!

The two streaks of Dao lightning showed no mercy at all. They simultaneously hammered down upon the sable creature, then began smashing into each other as well. As the two streaks of fiery lightning and watery lightning collided, they unleashed an utterly ruinous level of explosive power that caused even Ning himself to be in awe.

Even most supreme World Gods would be instantly slain by such an attack. As for transcendent World Gods, they would be heavily injured at the very least. A few consecutive blows would ensure that they would perish.

Only Daolords of the First Step would be able to endure such a blow, but even they would be heavily restricted and bound.

Boom! Boom! The two streaks of Dao lightning furiously swirled around the sable creature's body, and each time they collided they released tremendous amounts of power, causing Sabafey's speed and strength to both fall dramatically.

"This is Dao lightning!" Sabafey called out in shock.

"Yes it is." Ning charged forward once more.

"So what if you have Dao lightning? It can at most slow me down. It can't kill me!" Sabafey remained as ferocious and savage as ever. His true body was indeed comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step, allowing him to endure the strikes of these two types of Dao lightning. However, he was still hindered tremendously by them. He was now slightly slower than Ning!

Boom! Boom! Boom! His warblade and his greatsword still held roughly half of their former level of power. He was still able to crush Ning in power.

Still, things were now much simpler for Ning. Now that he had an advantage in speed, he was able to advance and withdraw at his leisure. In addition, his foe's advantage in strength was now much smaller than before.

“Kill!”

“Kill!”

The two continued to battle ferociously.

“I am a special lifeform. This cultivator has to be using his divine power at an incredible rate. He won’t be able to hang on for much longer, while I’ll be able to keep going for quite some time.” Sabafey was filled with confidence. He was certain he would be able to keep fighting for an extended period of time.

“Every single drop of my azureflower mist energy represents the distillation of all my divine power, heartforce, and Immortal energy. I’m not using any particularly powerful divine abilities for this fight. I’ll be able to go on for ages. This special lifeform has to be using some sort of secret art which allows him to release tremendous amounts of power, but I’m certain he won’t be able to maintain it for too long.” Ning was filled with confidence as well.

Ning was merely using [Three Heads, Six Arms]. This divine ability used up fairly little divine power. Ning was mainly relying on his azureflower mist energy in this battle, and it wasn’t being used up that quickly.

This battle went on for more than two full hours.

At first, both were very confident. As time went on, both Sabafey and Ning grew increasingly amazed. By now, Ning only had sixteen drops of his azureflower mist energy left.

“I admit defeat!” Finally, Sabafey let out a disgruntled growl. “Given how much power you have unleashed, you have to be using up divine power at an incredible rate. How is it even possible for you to continue fighting for this long? How?!”

If Ning was using abilities like the [Starseizing Hand], he would indeed be using up divine power at an astonishing rate.

Ning let out a sigh of relief.

He had won. Finally, he had won.

He could sense the golden book in his possession begin to transform. He was now under the protection of the Astral Islands, which acknowledged the fact that he had just won ten battles in a row on the fourth island.

“Hand over your legacy treasures.” Ning stared at him. If it wasn’t for the fact that this person was also under protection, Ning would’ve shown him no mercy at all and slain him. This person wasn’t going to be able to hold on for much longer.

“Don’t be smug. I was defeated by the others on the fifth stratum, after all.” Sabafey let out a hoarse growl. “There are many on the fifth stratum who are stronger than me. You are indeed quite strong, but your insights into the sword are quite mediocre. Ahaha... you are even inferior to a special lifeform like myself.”

As he spoke, he waved his hand and tossed out a large amount of legacy treasures. Upon losing, he had to hand over everything he had unless Ning voluntarily accepted less. He didn’t dare violate the rules of the Astral Islands.

“EXIT!” Sabafey raised his head and let out an angry shout.

Whoosh! Spacetime twisted around him, causing his sable form to disappear into thin air.

Ning waved his hand, collecting the many legacy treasures. His golden book immediately sent him an alert, informing him that he had already acquired a full legacy and that he was permitted to leave the Astral Islands whenever he wished.

“A full set?” Ning wasn’t that surprised. He knew that Sabafey had many legacy treasures on him, including a full legacy set.

Swoosh!

Ning waved his hand again, causing the Elementum Waterflame Gourd to fly towards him as well.

Ning put away the gourd. If it hadn’t been for this gourd he probably would’ve lost this fight, even if he was able to keep himself alive. Upon losing, he would’ve been knocked down to the third stratum once more,

where he would've had to slowly accumulate enough wins for another promotion.

“Sabafalle. He was merely an individual who wasn't strong enough to stay in the fifth stratum permanently. He was beaten down into the fourth stratum... and yet, he is incredibly powerful. My sword-arts are indeed a weak point.” Prior to this, Ning didn't fully realize how great a weakness this was. However, the more he battled against other incredibly talented figures, the more he realized how lacking his sword-arts were. In the end, he simply hadn't spent enough time as a World-level cultivator.

“So many of the cultivators on the fifth stratum are more powerful than him?”

A flicker of battle-lust appeared in Ning's eyes. “Good. The stronger they are, the better.”

Ning raised his head and called out, “Exit!”

Whoosh.

Spacetime twisted around Ning, causing him to be teleported away and back to his own astral island.

# Chapter 36: The Watcher in the Dark Abyss

The six strata of astral islands continuously circled around each other in a very orderly manner.

At the very top stratum, the sixth stratum, there was just a single astral island. The fifth stratum had a total of twelve astral islands that slowly circled each other.

Rumble...

One of the hundred-plus islands belonging to the fourth stratum began to slowly fly upwards.

“What?”

“Is that...”

“Someone made it to the fifth stratum.”

The many cultivators on the lower strata of the Astral Islands all raised their heads to stare at the higher-level islands. Hundreds of thousands of them were watching as this particular island ascended from the fourth stratum to the fifth stratum.

Many cultivators felt complicated feelings in their heart. They dreamed of being able to make it to the fifth stratum. That way, they would similarly be able to receive the protection of the Astral Islands! Alas, this was far, far too difficult a task.

“A change in destiny...”

This was what countless cultivators were murmuring silently to themselves.

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“He was quite fast. He was brought here alongside the rest of us in this batch, but he actually made it to the fifth stratum before I did.” A jade-haired woman dressed in silvery, semi-translucent gauze was murmuring



to herself softly from within her island on the fourth stratum. “And a cultivator at that. I’ve never ever met any World-level cultivators who are a match for me, but almost as soon as I arrived in the Brightshore Kingdom I encountered one. How intriguing. What’s more, the Brightshore Kingdom treats cultivators and special lifeforms equally, giving no special preferences or advantages to either.”

“I like this place.” A smile appeared on the jade-haired woman’s face as natural mist began to swirl around her.

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“I never would’ve thought that those puny cultivators would give rise to someone who might be a match for me. He actually made it to the fifth stratum before I did.” A devilishly handsome silver-haired youth was murmuring softly to himself.

He was a member of the Aeonians who had long ago found the path he needed to take to become a Samsara Daolord. However, he wanted to become more powerful before doing so. That way, he would benefit even further from his Awakening of his Aeonian bloodlines.

Still, he had to admit that the Brightshore Kingdom truly had gathered many freakishly talented figures. The fourth stratum alone was filled with many figures who had been quite difficult for him to overcome. This made him quite cautious.

Anyone capable of surging into the fifth stratum so quickly was definitely a powerful figure.

“Although cultivators are individually weak, there’s simply too many of them. There are far more of them around than we Aeonians. In the end, the law of large numbers means they will give birth to many freakishly strong figures.” The silver-haired youth mused to himself, “Once I enter the fifth stratum, I’ll definitely have to test him out myself.”

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Ning’s ascension to the fifth stratum did indeed arouse the interest of quite a few of the other freakishly talented World-level cultivators. The

ability to make it into the fifth stratum was a testament to his strength!”

“Another person has joined us in the fifth stratum?”

“Interesting. A few days from now, I’ll have to give him a challenge and see how he does.”

“I wager that Kilostar will be the first challenger yet again. Ahh, forget it. Just let it be him.”

The fourth stratum and the fifth stratum were completely different.

The cultivators on the fourth stratum weren’t under any protection. As a result, they would rarely accept or issue challenges. They were all quite cautious. However, these twelve peerless geniuses on the fifth stratum were all incredibly strong and talented figures. This was why they were able to keep their positions within the fifth stratum stable. Even if they occasionally fell down to the next level, they would quickly rise up once more. All of them delighted in battle.

In fact, the entire reason why they were still here was because they wanted to keep fighting!

As for the legacies? There was no point in being greedy. They merely needed to local the ones they actually needed. The best part of being here was the ability to battle against all these World-level cultivators. The experience they gained through combat was quite useful to them.

An astral island within the fifth stratum.

A skinny, swarthy child dressed in a silver cape was flipping through his golden book, roaring with laughter. “Ahahah! He didn’t disappoint me. He actually beat that special lifeform named Sabafalle. Although Sabafalle is a bit of an idiot, beating him is no easy task. Interesting, interesting.”

“Still, simply defeating Sabafalle doesn’t mean much. Sabafalle is completely incapable of standing stably amongst the ranks of the other fifth stratum individuals. Kid, I’m going to teach you the true meaning of the phrase, ‘there is always someone stronger than the strong’.” The skinny, swarthy child laughed.

“Challenge issued!”

He issued a direct challenge to Ning through the golden book.

“Heh heh heh... the other eleven fellows on the fifth stratum will all give me some face. Same as always! I’ll be the first to challenge the newcomer.” A look of excitement was in the swarthy-skinned child’s eyes.

All of them had lived together for quite some time. They had formed certain habits long ago.

Each time a newcomer made it to the fifth stratum for the first time, it would be Kilostar who would challenge that person first. Kilostar wasn’t necessarily the most powerful of the twelve, but he had the fewest weaknesses. He was capable of dealing with any foes that appeared. Even if he had to fight against that terrifying fellow from the sixth stratum, he’d still be able to at least keep himself safe! In other words... he was capable of dealing with any World-level cultivator, no matter how freakishly talented that person was.

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The dark abyss directly below the hundreds of thousands of astral islands.

At the very bottom of the abyss.

Hiss. Crackle. Nine strange flames were flickering here.

Above the flames was a horizontally placed longspike that was over a thousand meters long. An enormous haunch of meat that was at least three hundred meters long was currently spitted on the spike.

The beast’s flesh was being slowly roasted by the nine flames, and its surface was just slowly turning red. To fully cook it would probably take quite some time.

“Delicious. Absolutely delicious.” A burly, nearly-naked man with tousled black hair was seated, dressed in simple battle garbs. In front of him was a large basin that was over thirty meters long, filled with roasted meat. He was chomping through the meat with relish.

Sitting opposite of him was a muscular golden-haired man dressed in golden armor. This man also had an enormous basin front of him, also filled with roasted meat.

“King Wu, your hunting skills really aren’t bad. This Bloodflame Dragon had to be comparable to a Verge-level Daolord. Its flesh is simply savory.” The golden-armored warrior was crunching his way through the meat as he spoke. Not just anyone was powerful enough to chew through this! “Hunting these things really isn’t easy. I think you Imperials must have damn near wiped them out of the Endless Territories by now.”

“We pretty much wiped them out ages ago.” The black-haired, nearly-naked man shook his head. “The Hegemon, that old bastard, captured more than anyone else. He’s able to instantly teleport to any territory he pleases, whereas I actually had to physically run across countless territories before I was able to find a single Bloodflame Dragon. I then had to pretend to be a cultivator, for fear that once it realized who I was it would self-destruct rather than let me capture it. It took forever for me to capture it! Ehehe... but now that I have one, I can slowly savor it for an extremely long period of time.”

Bloodflame Dragons were incredibly, terrifyingly powerful beasts. They were unlike cultivators or Aeonians; they neither used divine power nor had any Immortal energy. They were actually similar to bugbeasts, but they were far more powerful than bugbeasts.

However, it was incredibly rare for one of them to be found in the Endless Territories. They had been driven to the point of extinction long ago, precisely because the Brightshore Imperials’ favorite food was Bloodflame Dragons.

A Bloodflame Dragon which had reached the Verge of the Daomerge had a body that was comparable in size to an entire chaos star. If you ate just a thousand meters of it with each meal, you would be able to feast for an extremely long period of time.

Alas, ancient creatures such as the members of the Brightshore Imperials would live for even longer.

“King Wu.” The golden-armored warrior glanced off into the distance towards a strange beast that was wreathed in flames. This creature possessed tremendous vitality and power, but it was currently suffering all sorts of unspeakable torments. “I heard that you Imperials just gained a new clansmen. Shouldn’t you take his training a bit more seriously?”

“For me to even keep an eye out for him me being much more serious than usual. Yeah, this abyss is filled with plenty of danger, but so long as I keep an eye out I’ll be able to guarantee that he stays alive,” the black-haired man said between mouthfuls of meat.

“Eh?” The black-haired man suddenly raised his head to stare upwards.

His gaze pierced through the darkness of the abyss as well as the protection of the Astral Islands, allowing him to see Ji Ning. Ji Ning was currently flipping through his golden book within his room in his astral island.

Right at this moment, Ning suddenly found himself seized by an invisible, inexplicable terror. It was as though some terrifying creature had just taken notice of him.

“It seems a new kid is about to join your Twelve Palaces as well.” The black-haired man looked towards the golden-armored warrior. “He made it to the fifth stratum quite quickly, and he’s a cultivator just like you are.”

“He’s not bad, I suppose.” The golden-armored man laughed. “We cultivators are fairly weak in general. It is quite rare for an extremely powerful cultivator to emerge. We simply can’t compare to the members of your race. All of you are born with utterly enormous power.”

“Is that comparable? Is that even comparable?!” The black-haired man glared at him. “How many of you are there? How few of us are there? The Hegemon, that old bastard... how much time does he need to spend wandering the Endless Territories before he is able to find another member of our race? For each new member of our race that is born, another ten Daolords emerge amongst you cultivators. You cultivators give birth to monsters by the bundle. Just look at the Twelve Palaces. How many Daolords do you have? And how few members do we have in our

imperial clan?"

# Chapter 37: The Plight of Su Youji

“Ahaha!” The golden-armored warrior laughed. “Fine, I misspoke.”

“Sometimes, I really envy you cultivators. There is a stupid large number of you. You guys are absolutely everywhere. Every single territory has you cultivators in them.” The black-haired man sighed and shook his head. Suddenly...

“THAT BRAT! Is he trying to die?!” The black-haired man’s eyes suddenly bulged out. Two streaks of golden light shot out of his eyes, passing through the barriers of spacetime and reaching a distant figure in a distant place.

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The Astral Islands.

“What just happened?” Ning’s entire body had turned stiff. He felt as though an utterly terrifying presence had suddenly taken notice of him. However, that terrifying sense of danger quickly dissipated.

“Who was that just now?” Ning guessed that it had to have been an incredibly powerful figure who was scrying upon him, a figure that didn’t even bother to hide his aura. If he had, there was no way Ning would’ve been able to sense him.

“That sense of danger... it was second only to the sensation I felt when I encountered that terrifying behemoth that brought me here,” Ning mused to himself.

The terrifying behemoth that had devoured him and brought him to this place was the most terrifying thing Ning had ever encountered in his life. It vastly surpassed any and all experts Ning had encountered in the past.

The Brightshore Kingdom was an organization that was on the same general level of power as the entire Dao Alliance itself. The Dao Alliance was unfathomably powerful, while the Brightshore Kingdom was very secretive and quite powerful as well.

“Doesn’t matter, I guess. Either of them can crush me like a bug.” Ning

couldn't be bothered to worry about it. The point of the almighty Hegemon bringing them here was to raise a crop of powerful cultivators. Even the most powerful of organizations would need constant injections of fresh blood, after all.

No matter how powerful their elite experts were, only their Eternal Emperors would live eternally. Samsara Daolords who did not succeed in the Daomerge would all perish eventually. Thus, they needed to ensure a constant, steady stream of new blood.

Ning was one of them, a future expert of the Brightshore Kingdom.

"Mm. Fortunately, Youji is still alive." Ning flipped through the golden book again, then let out a sigh of relief.

"Eh? Someone just challenged me?" Ning frowned. One of the talented geniuses of the fifth stratum had just issued him a challenge. It must be understood that the twelve members of the fifth stratum had been on that stratum for a long period of time. They were all definitely superior to Sabafalle in power.

Ning had been forced to pull out his Elementum Waterflame Gourd for the sake of defeating Sabafalle.

"I'm currently protected by the Astral Islands. Even if I lose, I would at most lose some legacy treasures. However... I need to make sure this set gets to Su Youji first. If too much time passes, something unexpected might happen." Ning didn't dare to be too arrogant.

Ning waved his hand. Whoosh! Three hundred and twenty legacy treasures suddenly appeared before him. These were all fiery red leaves. The fiery leaves were all gathered together, and Ning could immediately sense the tremendous amount of information they contained, as well as that blazingly powerful aura of fire.

This was a legacy pertaining to the Dao of Fire. Sabafalle, Ning's previous opponent, had walked the Dao of Fire. The reason he had kept these legacy treasures with him was so that he could be in constant contact with the blazing will they contained. However, the treasures had now fallen into Ning's hands.



All he had to do was swear a lifeblood oath and he would immediately be able to study this legacy.

Ning did end up learning it, but he simply memorized its contents. This legacy was indeed quite profound and remarkable. Just by reviewing the entire legacy from start to finish, Ning's insights into the Dao of Fire increased substantially, reaching a level of near-parity with his Dao of Water or his Dao of Thunder.

"Possession of a legacy really does make a big difference," Ning mused to himself. "Still, my Dao is the Dao of the Sword. I can't waste my time and energy on fire." Ning quickly buried this legacy into another corner of his mind. He had simply memorized it to gain a bit of additional experience, as all Daos shared certain commonalities. This legacy contained many abstruse mysteries that would be of some use to Ning in his mastery of the Dao of the Sword.

"Time to challenge her." After looking through the legacy treasure, Ning nodded silently to himself. Su Youji was quite talented in the Dao of Fire. If he gave this to her, it would be of tremendous benefit to her in mastering the Dao of Fire. She would improve quite quickly.

Ning sent Su Youji a challenge.

"I hope she accepts. She has to accept." Ning was rather worried and nervous.

He had learned the location of Su Youji's astral island from Daolord Flameflow, but Su Youji didn't know that Ning had reached the fifth stratum. If she suddenly saw someone from the fifth stratum challenge her, would she accept?

If she did not, then Ning would have to accept this duel from Kilostar, his fifth stratum challenger. If he won, that was one thing, but if he lost... his legacy treasures would all be gone as well.

It wouldn't be too hard for Ning to get another set of legacy treasures, but to get another set that was of the Dao of Fire which Su Youji could use would be quite difficult. In addition, if too much time passed... Su Youji might perish.

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The bottom stratum of the hundreds of thousands of astral islands. One of the islands was covered with plants and flowers. This was a very beautiful island.

Su Youji, dressed in fiery red robes, was lying within the grass, staring at the skies. A look of exhaustion was on her face.

“If this keeps up, I really won’t be able to endure for much longer. Master... I probably won’t be able to accompany you for much longer.”

Su Youji lay there in the grass, utterly exhausted. She truly had almost no energy left.

Ji Ning had given her his bugbeasts and his set of Hellwind Golems. At first, she had indeed been able to win quite a few battles in a row with ease. On the first stratum, there really weren’t that many who were a match for her.

But soon, trouble began to appear.

News that she had many bugbeasts and a set of Hellwind Golems quickly began to spread. There were many powerful World-level cultivators who wanted those bugbeasts and those powerful golems!

For example, there wasn’t a significant difference in power between cultivators on the third stratum and those on the fourth stratum. If they had a set of Hellwind Golems helping them out, a third stratum cultivator might be able to charge into the fourth stratum and have a chance at acquiring a full legacy.

Especially for those who specialized in close combat, a set of Hellwind Golems and a host of bugbeasts would allow them to become far stronger.

Many of the World-level cultivators who had been living here at the Astral Islands for a long time knew each other. At critical times, they would issue each other challenges to avoid dangerous battles. Thus, in the end there were three powerful World-level cultivators who found out about the golems and the bugbeasts.

Two of these three came from the third floor, with one coming from the fourth floor. All of them furiously challenged Su Youji day in and day out. Su Youji did her best to avoid them. When she could not, she would go fight the ones on the third floor.

“I was able to hold on for a few times... but how much longer will I be able to hold?” Su Youji mumbled to herself. She had been here for more than half a year, and the past few months had been an utter nightmare.

Rumble...

Suddenly, an island ascended from the fourth stratum to the fifth stratum.

“The fifth stratum?” Su Youji’s eyes lit up. “A cultivator reached the fifth stratum? Could it be Master?” She deeply hoped that it was Ning, but she knew that there were many individuals of tremendous talent and skill amongst the fourth stratum.

“I hope it is Master. So long as Master can stay alive... that is enough.” Su Youji prayed silently. She didn’t hope for Ning to rescue her. Logically speaking, there was no way for Ning to even find out which island she was on.

Just as her thoughts were racing, suddenly...

“A challenge?” Su Youji could sense that yet another challenge had been sent to her golden book. She remained quite calm, because she received challenges every single day. Her bugbeasts and golems were simply too irresistible.

“A challenge from the fifth stratum?” Su Youji was badly shocked.

Her bugbeasts and golems were indeed attractive, but it made no sense for those protected freaks on the fifth stratum to take an interest in them. Prior to this, the highest-level challenge had come from someone on the fourth stratum, and that had been her only challenge from that stratum.

“Eh? It seems... to be from that person who just made it to the fifth stratum?” Su Youji quickly noticed this. Every day, she would go through the golden book, and she recognized the twelve markers that originally belonged to the fifth stratum islands. Given her memory as a Chaos

Immortal, she was naturally able to memorize those twelve at once. The person who had just challenged her was not one of the twelve.

“This person challenged me immediately after reaching the fifth stratum? If this person has already received protection, it makes no sense for him to be interested in my bugbeasts and golems. Could it... truly be Master?” Many thoughts flashed through Su Youji’s mind.

She didn’t dare to believe it.

She felt that it was all wishful thinking.

However... she also had the vague feeling that it really could be her master. Logically speaking, there was no reason for a newly ascended fifth stratum expert to immediately issue a challenge to her.

“Could it be that Master had a way to discover the astral island which I am on?” Su Youji hesitated for a long moment.

“Screw it. I’m at the brink of collapse anyhow. Even if it really is an enemy, I’d be satisfied with my defeat coming at the hands of someone on the fifth stratum.” Su Youji gritted her teeth, then accepted the challenge.

She quickly entered a room in her island covered by divine runes. As the runes lit up and activated, spacetime began to twist around her as she was teleported off of the astral island.

This was yet another oceanic island. There was a volcano on this island that was belching lava and flames, causing the island to be covered with a layer of grimy soot.

Su Youji appeared out of nowhere. She immediately saw a figure off in the distance.

A white-robed figure.

A figure carrying a sword on his back.

“Master...” Su Youji’s body trembled slightly as she murmured these words.

“Youji.” The figure turned and looked at her.

# Chapter 38: Kilostar

Su Youji's eyes instantly reddened. She was both shocked and delighted. Her heart was filled with many complex emotions. She felt excited for Ji Ning upon realizing that he had fought his way through so many World-level cultivators to make it to the fifth stratum, and also celebrated for herself.

The exhaustion and pressure she felt was all wiped away.

"Youji." Ning's form blurred as he transformed into a streak of light that flew to her side. He looked at her carefully. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm just so happy." Su Youji finally smiled, and her smile was absolutely incandescent. She now looked like her old self again. "If you came just a bit later, Master, you probably wouldn't be able to find me."

"What's going on?" Ning was shocked. "You are on the first stratum. Those bugbeasts and golems should've been enough to let you hang on for quite some time."

"Against the first stratum cultivators, I would've been, yes. But third stratum and fourth stratum cultivators often send me challenges." Su Youji said helplessly, "I can't even avoid them."

"Third and fourth stratum? There are so many cultivators on the first stratum. Why would they single you... shit!" Ning turned pale. He realized what had happened. He had given her those bugbeasts and golems with the best of intentions, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Here at the Astral Islands, whenever someone was discovered to be in possession of good treasures that person would often find himself targeted. What, then, of such a powerful set of golems and bugbeasts? Although it was hard for most of the cultivators here to send each other messages, there were indeed a few alliances and partnership. It made sense that word would eventually spread to the third and fourth strata.

"I screwed up." Ning shook his head.

"It wasn't your fault, Master. Even I didn't realize what was going to

happen. Only later on did I understand how badly they wanted my golems and bugbeasts,” Su Youji said.

“You must have been exhausted.” Ning could imagine how life had been for her recently. Those third and fourth strata cultivators had assuredly done everything they could to try and force Su Youji to fight them. Although she had struggled and fought back, how long would she be able to do so? As more time passed, most likely there would be even more powerful cultivators who would take interest in her.

“I admit defeat.” Ning suddenly spoke out in a high voice, his words echoing within the air above the volcanic island.

“Master?” Su Youji was stunned.

“I admit defeat in my duel against you.” Ning laughed. “This set of legacy treasures is for you. Don’t you need any other treasures?”

Su Youji suddenly realized what was happening.

“Hurry up. This set of legacy treasures is useless to me, and I’ve already received the protection of the Astral Islands.” Ning laughed as he waved his hand, causing the three hundred and twenty leaves filled with the Dao of Fire to float over towards Su Youji.

Su Youji immediately waved her hand to accept this legacy. She had won this battle. If she wanted to do so, she could demand that Ning hand over all of his legacy treasures. But of course, since she was going to leave the Astral Islands there was absolutely no point to acquiring more of these legacy treasures. You had to acquire a full set in order to gain a legacy, after all.

“Alright. Now that you have a full legacy, hurry up and leave the Astral Islands,” Ning instructed. “This place is far too dangerous for you.”

For someone like Su Youji, this was indeed an incredibly dangerous place. Without the bugbeasts, she was at high risk of death. With the bugbeasts and golems, she became the target of even more powerful cultivators.

“Alright.” Su Youji felt many complex emotions in her heart.

“Also. Once you leave the Astral Islands, do your best to enter the Twelve Palaces,” Ning said. “At present, you most likely aren’t strong enough to attract their interest. However, now that you have this legacy, you’ll be able to grow much more powerful. Focus on your cultivation, and if the opportunity arises you should do your best to enter the palaces. In the future, I will join the Twelve Palaces as well.”

“Twelve Palaces?” Su Youji was puzzled.

“The most powerful organization in the Brightshore Kingdom. At the very apex of the Brightshore Kingdom stands its Twelve Palaces and its imperial clan.” Ning gave her a simple explanation. “You only acquired a full legacy thanks to my assistance, and so the Twelve Palaces won’t grant you automatic entry. You’ll need to train hard and undergo many trials before being permitted to enter the Twelve Palaces.”

“Understood.” Su Youji knew her own limits. To even escape this place alive was a stroke of tremendous luck. She didn’t daydream about being granted automatic entry into the Twelve Palaces.

“This is my talisman. Keep it with you at all times, and I’ll be able to sense your location. After I leave the Astral Islands, I’ll go find you.” As Ning spoke, he handed out a jade talisman to her.

Su Youji accepted the jade talisman. It was slick and cold in her hands. She nodded slowly. “Alright.”

“Go, then. Be careful once you enter the rest of the Brightshore Kingdom,” Ning instructed.

“Don’t worry. After what happened here, I’m going to be even more careful in the future. Besides... even if the outside world is a dangerous place, it can’t possibly be as dangerous as these astral islands.” Su Youji chuckled.

These two, master and retainer, didn’t have too long to chat. In the end, they had to part once more as they were each teleported to their own astral islands.

Su Youji first memorized the entire legacy, then chose to depart.

“Damn.”

“That bitch actually acquired a full legacy and left.”

“That freak who made it to the fifth stratum lost to her on purpose? No wonder she had such valuable bugbeasts and golems. It must’ve been that freak who gave it to her.”

“Do you think that freak who made it to the fifth stratum will take revenge on us?”

“We are in trouble now.”

The cultivators who had been eyeing Su Youji and repeatedly challenging her for her treasures all began to grow restless and uneasy. However, neither Ning nor Su Youji were interested in revenge.

Although Su Youji had been driven to the brink of despair, she didn’t feel any hatred for them. She knew that they were also struggling to survive. When they encountered anything that could help them or increase their chances of acquiring a full set of legacy treasures, it was only natural for them to do anything they could to win it.

As Su youji saw it, she had already escaped from this sea of bitterness, whereas all of her tormentors were still struggling. In all the hundreds of thousands of astral islands, only those twenty or so figures who had received the protection of the Astral Islands would be truly at ease.

“What? He made it up, then fell down again?”

“He actually lost that set of legacy treasures to a first stratum cultivator?”

All the cultivators kept a tight watch on their golden books, and they noticed whenever any changes appeared. They were able to almost instantly scan through the information pertaining to all of the islands, and they quickly realized that one particular island now contained a legacy treasure pertaining to the Dao of Fire.

Someone on the fifth stratum had lost to someone on the first stratum? And that person just so happened to now have a legacy of the Dao of Fire?



“He lost on purpose?”

“Damn, why don’t I have friends like that?”

“Ugh.”

Ning’s astral island sank from the fifth stratum to the fourth stratum once more.

Kilostar, the cultivator on the fifth stratum, was a bit irritated by this. He had sent Ji Ning a challenge, but in the end Ji Ning had actually chosen to battle Su Youji instead. “He actually avoided my challenge and delivered his legacy treasure to a cultivator on the first stratum?”

“Hmph. I’ll keep challenging him. Let’s see if he has the balls to accept. If he does, I’ll hold him in some respect.”

The next day, Kilostar once more sent Ning a challenge. This time, Ning didn’t decline.

Ning was now under the protection of the Astral Islands, after all. He was brimming with confidence and the desire to do battle. He wanted to see just how powerful the freaks of the fifth stratum were. Kilostar was also a cultivator, after all!

The two were both teleported to a black oceanic island. They stared at each other from afar.

Kilostar had the appearance of a skinny, swarthy-skinned child. His silver cape fluttered in the breeze, and as soon as the battle began Kilostar transformed into a thousand clones. This sight instantly caused Ning’s face to tighten. “That’s the [Thousand Bodies Sutra].”

“Just so. This is the [Thousand Bodies Sutra].” Kilostar’s thousand clones were capable of joining together into a strange formation akin to a Thousand Elder Gods Formation. Ning was completely surrounded by Kilostar’s clones, and an almighty domain-type effect began to apply to the area, filling it with Kilostar’s power.

Although Ning fought back with all his power, going so far as to use his Elementum Waterflame Gourd, he wasn’t able to do anything to this

formation at all.

As for the thousand Kilostars, they continuously assaulted Ning. Ning's two mighty streaks of Dao lightning blasted out with wild abandon, slowing down and restricting the actions of the many Kilostars, and Ning struck out with maximum power each time. Although Kilostar was absolutely dominating Ning in this battle, Ning's six Eternal weapons gave him an utterly airtight defense.

"Your sword-arts aren't that powerful, but your defenses really are tight." Kilostar then merged with the rest of his clones into one body.

With his clones merged together, he now had a body comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step. He was now able to use divine abilities as well!

Although Ning's azureflower mist energy enhanced his body, there was no way for him to use that mist energy to cast divine abilities.

Kilostar wielded a single scimitar in one hand, and his saber-arts were ephemeral and unpredictable. He was incredibly strong and incredibly fast, a far more frightening foe than Sabafalle.

Ning's swords were trembling with each collision, but fortunately he was able to use his six swords to defend in succession. He was being completely dominated in this fight, but every so often Ning would intentionally allow one of Kilostar's blows to land upon him, resulting in the power of his aquaflect armor playing quite a few nasty tricks on his foe.

"I have an utter ocean of divine power thanks to the [Thousand Bodies Sutra], but how is it that YOU are able to keep fighting for so long?" After fighting for an extended period of time, Kilostar was completely stunned. "Screw this, I'm done! This is just an utter waste of my divine power. My name is Kilostar. What is your name? You are indeed strong enough to reside amongst us within the fifth stratum. If nothing else, you can use your divine power to keep fighting until you exhaust and defeat some of the others on our stratum."

"My name as Darknorth." Ning smiled as well. On this day, he became

friends with Kilostar.

Still, in the end Ning acknowledged defeat in this battle. Thus, he once more fell, this time from the fourth stratum to the third stratum.

# Chapter 39: Life in the Astral Islands

A year later.

There were now fifteen astral islands within the fifth stratum, all slowly circling each other. Ji Ning sat within one of the astral islands, seated atop a wooden seat and slowly sipping a cup of wine as he read through the golden book.

Whoosh.

One of the other astral islands in the fifth stratum suddenly began to drop down towards the fourth stratum.

“What a mess.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh softly.

Indeed. During the past year since he had been the first in his group of cultivators to make it to the fifth stratum, others such as Gorho, the Empress, and the Waterstrider had all made it to the fifth stratum as well. This made the fifth stratum much more lively than it had been in the past. Previously, all twelve of the cultivators on the fifth stratum knew each other quite well, resulting in very few challenges amongst them. Most of them would engage in training, only choosing to issue challenges once they felt as though they had made some new breakthroughs.

But the sudden addition of so many new geniuses had caused a huge disturbance. The twelve original denizens of the fifth stratum were all intrigued and excited, beginning to issue challenges to the newcomers.

One battle after another had begun to play out. With each battle, a fifth stratum expert would lose and fall down to the fourth stratum. However, that person would quickly be able to ascend to the fifth stratum once more.

Fall down, rise up.

Fall down, rise up.

Every few days, an astral island would fall down.

The fifth stratum always had at least nine astral islands within it. At

most, it had a total of sixteen.

“Compared to all these other freaks and geniuses, I really am just an ordinary figure.” Ning let out a sigh.

After battling many times against the others, Ning realized that the vast majority of the people within the fifth stratum were special lifeforms! Only a small number of them were cultivators! Everyone had his or her own specialty, and only Kilostar could be said to have almost no weaknesses.

Kilostar had a total of a thousand clones!

In terms of raw combat power, most likely only Ji Ning was a match for him. Once he used his thousand bodies to form that great formation, there was no one capable of injuring him at all. In terms of raw power, once his thousand bodies merged into one... he truly stood at the very top.

This was why Kilostar had never fallen from his position within the fifth stratum! As for the newcomer named Waterwalker, he was a special lifeform that similarly did not fall from the fifth stratum after reaching it. Ning had battled against him before as well. Waterwalker had a look of innocence in his eyes, almost as though he was a newborn child. He just stood there and allowed Ning to attack him as he pleased. Waterwalker himself simply transformed into an enormous globe of water, and none of Ning's attacks could harm him whatsoever.

This virtually invincible defensive technique, all by itself, was enough to let Waterwalker find stable footing here on the fifth stratum.

“Kilostar relies on his thousand clones and that formation, making it impossible for anyone to harm him. As for Waterwalker, he can transform into an enormous water drop that is equally impervious to harm. Still... Waterwalker seems to be a completely guileless man. I wonder if he really is that innocent or if it is all a façade.” Ning was puzzled by this as well. Although they had only met a single time, the man had given Ning a good impression. The problem was that his innocence seemed excessive to the point of artifice. Before the duel between the two of them had started, he had repeatedly asked Ning all sorts of random questions. It was as though

he was curious about everything.

Their 'fight' simply consisted of Ning attacking him and him not fighting back at all. No matter how hard Ning hit him, it was useless... and as Ning hit him, he actually continued to engage Ning in energetic conversation, continuing to ask Ning all sorts of random questions. In the end, Ning had to admit defeat.

"My body isn't any whit weaker than the bodies of those special lifeforms. My only weakness lies in my sword-arts. If only I had mastered the sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art! If I could do that, I would be able to easily deal with any of these other freaks on the fifth stratum." Ning pondered on this matter. If he could master the sixth stance, his sword-arts would become comparable to Kilostar's saber-arts. This was the same level which Arroyo's saber-arts had been on, and also the same level which the trials of the three Mirrorsnow Paintings were on.

The sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art represented a specific level of attainment. At this level, a master-class World God could use a mere Dao weapon to unleash the power of a supreme World God.

With this sword-art and the Elementum Waterflame Gourd... Ning would be able to fight Kilostar to a standstill.

Two more months went by.

Ning finally managed to acquire a full sword-art legacy, but it was the legacy ranked seventy-third. Ning had been planning to wait a few days then gift this legacy to World God Pillsaint, who he was quite fond of, but he didn't expect that during this period of time he was once more accosted by Waterwalker. Ning was unable to do any damage to him whatsoever, and the man absolutely refused to admit defeat, instead continuing to engage Ning in conversation. In the end, it was Ning who once more was forced to admit defeat.

Waterwalker had a bad habit. After he won a challenge, he would insist on taking away all of his opponent's legacy treasures. As he put it, "I really like these legacies."

There was nothing Ning could do...

He could only sigh quietly to himself. World God Pillsaint, you've been here for quite some time already. Just wait patiently for a bit longer. When I find the chance, I'll give you another set of legacy treasures.

Five more months passed before Ning was able to acquire another set of sword-arts legacy treasures. This set was the one ranked number nineteen.

Within Ning's estate-world.

This was a vast place with a towering mountain at the center of it. At the tallest peak on this mountain there was a white-robed youth who was seated in the lotus position, staring at the wide world beyond the mountain.

"I've finally mastered this stance, the 'Silent World'."

From this vantage point at the top of the mountain, his gaze was able to see to the very edges of this estate-world. Ning felt as though this entire world was under his control. In addition, he had benefited from his acquisition of those two mighty sword-arts legacies. As a result, Ning finally mastered the fifth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the 'Silent World'.

"I've only mastered five stances. That is nothing." Ning shook his head.

In the Endless Territories, this was already an incredible achievement. World God Northrest himself had merely reached this level of sword-arts. However, Ning was now comparing himself to the terrifyingly talented geniuses which the Hegemon of the Brightshore Kingdom had selected from throughout the many territories.

"To reach the sixth stance is no easy feat. Even after gaining those two legacies... it'll take me tens of thousands of years at the very least, or perhaps as much as a few hundred thousand years." Ning shook his head and sighed.

Arroyo had made his breakthrough during the battle atop the Samsara Grinders.

The sixth stance would allow Ning to just barely fulfill the criteria necessary for overcoming Eternal Emperor Mirrorsnow's trials. To reach

this level truly would be very difficult. Ning was living in the Astral Islands, had a large group of fellow geniuses to test himself against, and two mighty sword-arts legacies. This was why he might be able to succeed in ‘just’ a few hundred thousand years at most. This seemed like a long period of time, but Ning had the temporal acceleration treasure known as the Luminous Room. A thousand years in the real world might be enough to allow him to master this technique.

“As for these two sword-arts legacies?” Ning waved his hand, causing a thick tome to appear.

This tome was six hundred pages long. Each of its pages was a legacy treasure. Ning had to acquire all six hundred pages before being able to merge them all into this book and acquiring the sword-arts legacy within it. This was the legacy that was ranked nineteenth.

Ning flipped the book open.

Every single page had a single character on it that was filled with the aura of the Dao of the Sword.

Ning had memorized this legacy long ago. As for the six hundred characters, they represented six hundred different types of sword-intents that allowed Ning to get a better understanding of this sword-art.

“This Daolord Shipstream truly loved calligraphy. I love calligraphy as well. That’s something we have in common.” After acquiring this legacy, Ning had also gained some information regarding Daolord Shipstream.

Daolord Shipstream was an ancient power who had reached the Verge of the Daomerge. In the end, he had failed his Daomerge. He had perished and his Dao dissipated.

He liked to wander about and disliked combat. He titled himself Shipstream because he liked to voyage through the Endless Territories. Due to his personality, his sword-arts didn’t focus on offense; instead, they were incredibly defensive!

He had left behind an extremely detailed and complete legacy, as well as those six hundred characters. Each legacy represented a specific sword-



intent. Ning himself was fond of using calligraphy to symbolize his sword-intent, and so he was easily able to understand the information and insights which Daolord Shipstream had sought to transmit through these characters. Given that Ning's sword-arts were quite defensively oriented to begin with, he was indeed able to quickly understand the true essence of the sword-arts of Daolord Shipstream. A short month after gaining this legacy, Ning had mastered the fifth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art.

Two sword-arts legacies.

The first was ranked seventy-three. It seemed dazzling but it actually had clear weaknesses.

The second was ranked nineteen. It had been created by Daolord Shipstream. It seemed ordinary and unremarkable, but it was actually filled with boundless wisdom.

Afterwards, Ning continued to focus on analyzing his sword-arts. Even though Kilostar once more issued Ning a challenge, Ning made his position quite clear. "I can admit defeat, but I absolutely cannot give you this sword-art legacy. If you don't accept my terms, then I won't admit defeat and we can just keep up this battle of attrition. In all honesty, most likely the only person capable of defeating Ning in a battle of attrition was Kilostar. But of course, that was if Ning didn't use any of his chaos jewels. When Ning had left the Badlands Territory, he had converted quite a bit of his chaos nectar into chaos jewels.

None of the other cultivators could possibly beat Ning in a battle of attrition.

Kilostar walked the path of the Dao of the Saber. He really didn't care about sword-arts at all and so he didn't mind Ning's terms.

Waterwalker... Ning wasn't able to do anything to him, but he wasn't able to do anything to Ning either.

Thus, the book which had been personally authored by Daolord Shipstream remained by Ning's side. Each day, Ning would spend much of his time silently meditating on this book, and his sword-arts continued to rise in profundity, especially in defense.

Ning was so absorbed in his sword-arts that he very nearly forgot all about World God Pillsaint. As far as Ning was considered, if he could help out he would, but that was a favor and not an obligation. World God Pillsaint had been here for countless years anyhow. To be here for another ten thousand years or hundred thousand years wouldn't be that big a deal to him.

Time flowed out. In the blink of an eye, more than five hundred years had gone by in meditation and battle.

# Chapter 40: Art, Stance Six – Unicorn's Heart

Within the estate-world of the first Mirrorsnow Painting.

There was a towering palace here that was absolutely beautiful. A figure slowly materialized atop the royal throne at the front of the hall. It was the golden-robed emperor.

"You've come again." The golden-robed emperor stared downwards.

Ji Ning nodded from his position below the throne. "Be careful this time. If you are overconfident, you might end up being defeated by me."

"This is the first time I've heard you say such a thing." The golden-robed emperor's eyes lit up as he produced that wide golden greatsword. He rose to his feet and began to walk down the stairs from his throne. "Come, come! Don't disappoint me."

Ning produced one of his Frostice Swords as well.

Ning stood there without moving. As for the golden-robed emperor, he slowly walked down the steps. Although the two had yet to engage, their auras were beginning to surge and press against each other. Both were carefully inspecting their foe. Although the golden-robed emperor had won every match, he himself was aware that Ning was posing an increasingly great threat to him.

"Something's off." The golden-robed emperor suddenly sensed something strange. Although Ning stood a distance away from him, he gave the emperor a sensation of unpredictable fluctuation. This was something he had never sensed before in his previous battles.

"Forget him. I'll smash it all to smithereens." The golden-robed emperor's path was a Dao of righteous valor and honor. He raised his golden greatsword up high, then sent it crashing downwards towards Ning.

Boom! A terrifying aura of power blasted out as the greatsword chopped

down furiously towards Ning, seeming to carry such great power that it could hack any foe to death. This terrifying aura alone was enough to freeze the hearts of many World-level cultivators.

Sniiiiick. Ning's frozen sword flashed out like a streak of azure mist as it scraped upwards towards the golden greatsword.

Although he was just using the flat of his blade to push at and scrape at the sword, this actually made things harder for the golden-robed emperor than a frontal clash would have! The strange power held within Ning's sword caused the emperor's golden greatsword to change directions, causing it to completely miss Ning.

If you couldn't hit your opponent, it didn't matter how powerful your sword-arts were.

"So his technique really has changed." The golden-robed emperor was startled.

"The [Nameless] sword-art truly is marvelous." Ning was overjoyed. Although he had just learned this sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, he hadn't actually employed it yet. This battle against the golden-robed emperor was his first time actually using it in battle.

This clash had resulted in him easily defeating the valiant, killing blow of the emperor. Although Ning had been able to withstand this strike in the past, it had always been incredibly taxing for him. In fact, he would stumble backwards after each block.

This time, he didn't have to use too much strength. He was able to effortlessly use a single strike to block this attack without even having to face it head-on.

"Again." The golden-robed emperor let out an angry roar. Suddenly, a golden streak of crescent sword-light appeared high in the air of the palace, then chopped down horizontally towards Ning.

Crack! Once again, Ning unleashed that seemingly casual strike in response. He sent his sword scraping against the edge of that golden crescent. As their weapons collided, the power of each person's sword-arts

began to clash against each other. The golden-robed emperor's sword-art were more dominating whereas Ning's sword-art was more ephemeral and unpredictable. However, for some reason Ning was able to change the direction of the emperor's sword yet again.

The golden greatsword had been sweeping directly towards Ning, but as Ning sent his own sword scraping and pushing down upon the greatsword, the sword-light ended up slashing into the ground in front of Ning's feet. It completely missed Ning.

"How can this be? This is impossible."

The golden-robed emperor was angry now. He launched one attack after another, and each sword was filled with truly valiant and dominating power.

Each strike of Ning's seemed to be very casual and relaxed, but in truth he had focused all of his concentration into each strike. He had unleashed his sword-arts to maximum effect, and during this battle he began to gain a better and better understanding of the application of this sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art. He began to better understand how to actually use it in battle, and as this battle proceeded Ning began to relax.

Snick! Snick! Clank!

Sword-light clashed over and over.

It was very strange. Generally speaking, when two experts battled their weapons would produce sonorous explosions, as though the heavens were about to collapse. However, whenever Ning's sword collided with his opponent's sword, it merely produced a very gentle sound. It was as though Ning was using a brush to write words on parchment. He seemed quite relaxed and at ease.

Snick!

Ning's fluctuating sword-light once more scraped against the golden sword-light. This time, it scraped straight past it and stabbed straight into the golden-robed emperor's throat.

The sword went straight through the emperor's throat. Everything went

still.

The golden-robed emperor came to a halt, and Ning withdrew his Frostice Sword.

“You’ve won.” The golden-robed emperor had a strange smile on his face. “Your sword-arts have been improving for years now. I knew that sooner or later, you would be able to defeat me. Still, even I didn’t expect that it would happen this quickly. Can you tell me what your sword-art is named?”

“This is a sword-art created by a major power. This the sixth stance, and its name is the ‘Unicorn’s Heart’,” Ning said.

“The Unicorn’s Heart?” The golden-robed emperor nodded slowly. “Your sword truly is ephemeral and unpredictable. It makes things quite uncomfortable for your foe.”

“Senior, your sword-art is honorable, direct, and dominating. I had to fight for very long before I was able to win through one fortunate strike,” Ning said. In truth, when he had first started fighting he hadn’t been very familiar with the Unicorn’s Heart. Naturally, it was very hard for him to win. However, as he slowly began to grow increasingly familiar with this technique, he had improved to the point of being able to stab through the emperor’s throat with one blow.

The [Nameless] sword-art was very interesting.

The first stance was the Heartsword stance. It required the wielder possess absolute control over his his sword, allowing his heart to be in control of the sword and the world around it.

The second stance was the Killsword stance. It was an utterly dominating and powerful stance.

The third stance was the Great Firmament stance. It allowed the user to create a world unto itself. In truth, this was the upgrade version of the Heartsword stance. It perfected the technique, giving it even more perfect defensive powers and making its attacks even tighter.

The fourth stance was the Horizon’s Edge stance. It could be described

with one word – fast!

The fifth stance was the Silent World stance. It could be described with one word – savage! The fourth stance and fifth stance were both attacking stances that were meant to be used against different types of foes. Some foes could only be dispatched with speed, others required dominating and savage sword-arts.

The sixth stance was the Unicorn's Heart stance. This represented an evolutionary transformation of the Great Firmament stance. It was much brighter than the Heartsword stance; the Heartsword stance only gave absolute control over the sword, whereas the Unicorn's Heart was able to produce all sorts of marvelous effects.

It could easily block, deflect, and redirect attacks. It could also kill foes!

This sword-art was ephemeral, unpredictable, and incredibly abstruse. It was extremely hard to comprehend. Fortunately, Daolord Shipstream's legacy and the book he had left behind were highly focused on defense. Once a defensive technique reached the later stages, it would also gain something akin to the flavor of the Unicorn's Heart. After all, truly powerful sword-arts all had things in common.

Thus, after five hundred years Ning was able to master this sixth stance.

"The first stance, Heartsword stance. The third stance, Great Firmament stance. The sixth stance, the Unicorn's Heart stance. All of them are highly defensive techniques that can also be used to slay my foes." Ning knew quite clearly that these three stances were fundamentally the same. All of them focused on tightly controlled sword-arts that sought out flaws to use for sure-fire kills.

The Killsword stance, Horizon's Edge stance, and Silent World stance were stances that were completely focused on attacking while holding nothing back.

"You have defeated me and passed my trial. However, you must defeat the other three as well," the golden-robed emperor said. "Only then shall you gain the legacy of the Eternal Emperor and become his personal disciple! Emperor Mirrorsnow's sword-arts were some of the most

terrifying sword-arts of all the Endless Territories. If you become his disciple, your future prospects shall be limitless.”

“Understood.” Ning nodded.

Ning currently had a total of three Mirrorsnow Paintings. The first held the golden-robed emperor, the second held the assassin, and the third held the fisherman.

The assassin’s sword was a bizarre sword that was focused on murder and death. In a world of darkness, the assassin would suddenly appear and disappear out of nowhere, his sword-light flashing as he stabbed at Ning.

Ning would be forced to stand there, Frostice Sword in hand, blocking each and every strike from the assassin. The assassin’s sword-arts were on the exact same level as the golden-robed emperor’s sword-arts, but they had completely different styles. They provided different insights to Ning, allowing Ning to gain many new insights into the Unicorn’s Heart. At first, he still found himself unaccustomed to dealing with the assassin’s fighting style. However, he slowly became accustomed to it and found it increasingly easy to deal with.

Snick! Swish!

Sword-light flashed as it stabbed straight through the assassin’s throat.

The assassin was incredibly slender. His face was covered with scales, and his eyes glowed with green light. This was the first time Ning had caught a clear glimpse of the assassin’s face.

“You won. Defeat the other three and you shall receive the Eternal Emperor’s legacy.” The assassin spoke in a hoarse voice, then disappeared once more.

The estate-world within the third painting. This was the world of the fisherman.

The two clashed for quite some time. The fisherman no longer seemed as relaxed and carefree as he had been in previous battles. This time, he fought with full intensity and deadly seriousness. Ning’s expressions were similarly solemn, and the two battled for more than two hours. This high-



intensity battle gradually began to wear both of them down.

It must be understood that Ning's battles against the other two had lasted for less than one hour.

"The fisherman's sword is unpredictable and fluctuating, and he uses that fishing pole of his to fight me. That pole is sometimes rigid but sometimes flexible, whereas my sword is incredibly sharp and resilient... and yet, I'm still unable to breach his defenses." Ning was beginning to understand.

The fisherman's sword was quite similar to his own Unicorn's Heart. Both were unpredictable, fluctuating sword-arts that sought out a chance to deliver a single lethal strike.

By comparison, the fisherman's sword had a 'softer' defense, but once he reached an opponent who was a match for him the fisherman unleashed virtually all of the potential within his sword-arts, resulting in Ning being completely unable to harm him.

Finally, the two came to a halt.

"Your sword-art is incredibly profound and mysterious. It truly is one of the most profound sword-arts of all the Endless Territories. However, my own sword-arts were passed down by the Eternal Emperor himself. If you wish to defeat me, you'll need to improve a little bit more." The fisherman calmly walked back to his pool and began to fish again. "You can leave now."

Ning wasn't disappointed. Instead, his heart was filled with joy. This battle with the fisherman had resulted in him improving dramatically in his Unicorn's Heart.

# Chapter 41: The Coming of Bertulu

After mastering the sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, 'Unicorn's Heart', Ji Ning spent another year before he was able to develop the third stance of his [Quintessence Sword-Intent], the 'Astral' stance.

Blackmist stance, Allgod stance, Astral stance. These three stances were named after three places or people that had a huge effect on him.

The Unicorn's Heart and the Astral stance were sword-arts on the same general level of power. However, when Ning used Violetjewel to executed the Astral stance he was able to unleash several times more power.

After his sword-arts improved, Ning became capable of standing firmly within the fifth stratum. Even Kilostar was merely on par with Ning.

In truth, when Kilostar used his full power he was clearly on a higher level of power than Ning. Unfortunately, Ning had the Elementum Waterflame Gourd and six sets of Violetjewel. It was hard for the other geniuses to compete against him in terms of wealth and treasures.

"You have six damn swords, whereas I just have a pair of warblades... and you, you sly bastard, keep on releasing lightning to attack me as well!" Kilostar was frustrated by his battles against Ning as well. He had to go all-out in each fight, but he was still only able to fight to a standstill. "Screw this, I'm done! I'm not going to accept any more challenges from you. Go ahead and admit defeat! I'd rather die than admit defeat in this battle."

Kilostar immediately transformed into a thousand clones again and entered his formation. He absolutely refused to admit defeat, and this great formation ensured that there really was no way anyone could do anything to him.

Ning was in quite a good mood, and so he voluntarily admitted defeat.

Thirty-two years after learning the Unicorn's Heart, Ning finally managed to piece together the footwork legacy he wanted.

"I finally have it." Ning stared at the jade tome in his hands. The

footwork legacy consisted of a series of jade slips, and there were a total of eight hundred slips. After acquiring all eight hundred, they came together to form a jade tome that radiated several large characters: “Swear the oath and you can view my true teachings.” There were a few other smaller characters hovering nearby those larger characters as well.

Ning reviewed the restrictive spells pertaining to the jade tome, then immediately swore the oath. A large amount of information then began to transmit into Ning’s mind.

Moments later, a series of tightly clustered characters began to emanate out of the jade tome, bringing with them an aura of marvelous and profundity.

“Footwork technique. What does this phrase means? It simply refers to a technique meant for movement! Unless there is a tremendous gap in power, a powerful footwork technique is far more effective than offensive or defensive techniques. This is true for both mortals as well as Eternal Emperors!

“If I am always a step ahead of you, your sword shall never touch me. Even if I can only dodge it by one centimeter, I’ll have rendered your sword-arts useless against me, no matter how powerful they are.

“If my footwork techniques are powerful, I’ll be able to strike my foes without him being able to strike me. All shall be under my control.”

Ning read these words, then slowly nodded. He understood the importance of a good footwork technique. When he was young and living in Swallow Mountain, his mother Yuchi Snow had personally taught him his first footwork techniques. Ning had never abandoned his progression in this area, and had always infused his insights into the Dao into his footwork techniques. He had even purchased a pair of Thunderlight Wings! His footwork abilities were actually quite excellent compared to his World-level peers. He actually wasn’t lacking in this area.

“All good footwork techniques share certain commonalities. They allow you to instantly explode with speed, allowing you to dodge attacks as best you can. Two people might have the same level of divine power and the

same insights into the Dao, but the one who has superior footwork techniques will be able to dodge faster. A good footwork technique can make a tremendous difference.

“This footwork technique of mine involves the cycling of divine power that can be divided up into three layers of expertise. The first level is most likely comparable to that of the footwork techniques most cultivators use, allowing them to dodge and move at high speed. The second allows for nearly instantaneous dodging that is at a far faster level. As for the third level...”

As Ning read on, he couldn't help but laugh awkwardly.

The cycling of divine power?

His greatest source of power came from his azureflower mist energy. No matter how strong his divine power became, it couldn't possibly compare to that mist energy! Although this technique's unique methods of cycling divine power had been transmitted into Ning's mind, it truly was of no use to him.

Still, Ning read on.

“The power you can unleash from your footwork depends on two things. The first is the way in which you cycle your divine power. The second is the skill with which you execute the techniques.

“Those who have a high level of skill are able to easily surpass those at a lower level of skill, even if they don't use any divine abilities.

“My footwork technique has a special history to it. Long ago, when I was paying my respects to the almighty Hegemon of the Brightshore Kingdom, I saw a lightning dragon. This lightning dragon was actually a streak of lightning which the almighty Hegemon had created that was capable of gaining eternity. When I saw how this ‘Eternal Thunderdragon’ moved about, I meditated for many years before coming up with this technique, the Thunderdragon footwork technique. It can be divided up into five different levels.

“The first level is the level known as ‘control’. Anyone who studies this

footwork technique of mine can master this level.

“The second level is the level known as ‘infusion’. You shall infuse all of your insights into the Dao into this footwork technique. If you are skilled in the Dao of Spacetime, you should infuse those insights into your footwork. If you are skilled in the Dao of the Saber, then you can do the same. Only once you truly and completely merge your deepest insights into the Dao into my Thunderdragon footwork technique shall you have mastered my ‘infusion’ level.

“The third level is the level known as ‘draconify’. When you use this footwork technique, an illusion of a lightning dragon shall protect your body, allowing your speed to increase dramatically. At this level, you shall have begin to grasp the true essence of this technique.

“The fourth level is the level known as ‘thunderdragon’. This footwork technique can be used to control a type of lightning which is on the same level as other types of Dao lightning. Once you reach the fourth level, the lightning you control can become one with your body. You shall be the lightning and the lightning shall be you. You’ll be able to move as fast as Dao lightning. Even I myself have only ever reached this fourth level.

“The fifth level is the level known as the ‘Eternal Thunderdragon’. After I created this technique, the almighty Hegemon looked it over and added a few improvements to two parts of it, then informed me that once this technique reached the apex one would be able to manifest a streak of Eternal lightning, then become one with it. I have spent dozens of chaos cycles painstakingly meditating on this technique as a Verge-level Daolord, but I’m still unable to make any improvements. I can’t even imagine what sort of level this ‘apex’ which the almighty Hegemon spoke of is at, but I’ve taken the liberty of describing it as the fifth level.”

Ning couldn’t help but sigh in amazement as he read this. This footwork technique was far too powerful.

The rest of the jade tome just included a few diagrams. There were a total of eighteen images of thunder dragons. As for the detailed information regarding the footwork technique as well as the divine power

cycling method, all of that had been directly transmitted into Ning's mind.

"The divine power cycling method is useless to me, but this footwork technique itself is incredibly powerful once one reaches the apex of it." Ning knew exactly what the phrase Eternal lightning entailed.

Chaos lightning belonged to the World level of power, which was why it could easily breach the limits of the Heavenly Daos. Chaos lightning flew incredibly fast, roughly ten times faster than the speed of light. Generally speaking, even most Daolords were unable to move that fast.

Dao lightning belonged to the Samsara level of power. Some Dao lightning was born from the endless primordial chaos, but some had been created by Daolords! In the Three Realms, Zhurong had created his own Zhurong Godfire while Suiren had created his Eternal Kindfire. Samsara Daolords were similarly capable of creating their own incredibly powerful types of Dao lightning. Dao lightning flew incredibly fast, far faster than Chaos lightning. Generally speaking, they were able to move a hundred times faster than the speed of light.

As for Eternal lightning... this level of lightning was something out of the legends. Ning had never heard of any type of Eternal lightning emerging naturally from the primordial chaos. Perhaps it existed, perhaps it did not. Only Eternal Emperors could hope to create Eternal lightning, and that only if they had reached incredibly profound levels of insight into the Dao of Lightning.

As for how fast Eternal lightning moved? Ning had no idea as he had never seen it before.

"When one reaches the apex of this footwork technique, one will be able to manifest a type of Eternal lightning, then merge with it?" Ning was speechless. How fast would such a person become?!

"Still, even the creator of this footwork technique was only able to reach the fourth level. This, despite the fact that he was so talented that he was able to develop it after merely seeing the Hegemon's own Eternal lightning. Most likely, the only reason why this footwork has a so-called 'fifth level' is because of the two alterations which the almighty Hegemon

made to it.” Ning instantly realized that the fifth level was most likely something illusory and untouchable, like the reflection of the moon in the waters of a lake. If even a Verge-level Daolord spent dozens of chaos cycles without being able to master it, who could?!

“My ambitions aren’t that high. I’ll be happy just reaching the third level.” Ning was still feeling quite excited.

At the third level, he would gain the protection of an illusory thunder dragon that would allow him to move with incredible speed.

Life for Ning in the Astral Islands was quite blissful. He had memorized two valuable sword-art legacies that he could train in, which included very detailed instructions on their use. He had also memorized an incredibly powerful footwork technique, one that was far superior to any other technique which Ning had ever seen. This, too, was available for Ning to train in as he pleased.

As for experts on his same general level? There were dozens of freakishly talented geniuses for him to duel against.

Time passed on, one day after another. The battles between the fifth stratum cultivators became rarer and rarer, as by now everyone had already fought everyone else. Some of them had battled each person multiple times by now. Even Kilostar and Waterwalker had dueled each other. But of course, the end result was that Waterwalker had been defeated. Kilostar maintained his undefeated streak within the fifth stratum.

Time flowed on, and in the blink of an eye Ning had spent a thousand years here at the Astral Islands.

The sixth stratum still had just a single astral island hovering within it. This was the residence of Bertulu, and he had issued no challenges. No one was qualified to truly challenge him.

Within this astral island there was a white-haired youth dressed in loose white robes who was seated in the lotus position on the ground. Suddenly, his eyes opened up. He had a gentle, warm gaze, but they seemed to hold the light of countless stars within them. He murmured softly to himself,

“A thousand years have gone past. The new cultivators have experienced a thousand years of tempering and growth. I imagine they should have reached a bottleneck in power by now. It is time for me to challenge them a bit. Mm... I shall start with Kilostar.”

Soon, something happened that stunned all of the cultivators of the hundreds of thousands of astral islands.

Kilostar, who had never fallen from the fifth stratum after entering it, had actually fallen down to the fourth stratum. All of his legacy treasures had been seized by the sixth stratum.

Everyone knew that the sixth stratum cultivator, Bertulu, had just struck out and defeated Kilostar!



# Chapter 42: Predeparture Preparations

“Hurry up! Bring out all your best wine.” Kilostar and Bertulu were seated facing to each other on an oceanic island, a stone table in front of them.

On one side was the skinny and swarthy Kilostar, dressed in that silver cape of his. On the other side was a white-robed, white-haired youth. The two had completely different looks and auras as well. Kilostar’s aura was rather valiant and explosive, whereas Bertulu’s aura was much warmer and more radiant. He was like the warmth of the sun, bringing comfort and friendliness to all who saw him.

“That’s more like it.” Kilostar grabbed the gourd of wine that had appeared on the stone table, lifted it up high, then began to guzzle it all down.

“Alright, alright. There’s no need for you to be this angry, Kilostar.” Bertulu let out a laugh.

“You insidious, sly, hypocritical wolf in cultivator’s clothing!” Kilostar glared ferociously at Bertulu. Even his third eye within his forehead was bulging with rage. “I have NEVER fallen down from the fifth stratum. It was all because of you! You deceitful bastard, I lost because of your tricks! That was bullshit! Bullshit! BULLSHIT!”

Bertulu chortled. “You lost, alright? Even if I did pull a few tricks, the end result was that you lost. In battle, the only thing that matters is the result. The process isn’t really important.”

“I trusted you! That’s the only reason you were able to trick me!” Kilostar was furious.

Actually, this wasn’t his first time being defeated by Bertulu. In the past, he had won ten battles in a row and was qualified to charge Bertulu for residence within the sixth stratum. However, Bertulu had swiftly dispatched him and sent him right back down to the fifth stratum. Over the course of many years, the twelve in the fifth stratum had tried numerous times to make it into the sixth stratum, but each time they were

quickly knocked down by Bertulu once more. The only person who could stably reside within the sixth stratum was Bertulu himself.

“If I had used my formation and focused completely on defense, there’s no way you could’ve beaten me,” Kilostar said angrily.

He was pissed off just thinking about it. He had never been knocked out of the fifth stratum before. He had wanted to keep his perfect record, leaving behind the legend of Kilostar once he departed from these Astral Islands. To be honest, Kilostar had been planning on leaving for some time now... but who would’ve thought that his golden record would be broken just before his departure? Now, he was back in the fourth stratum. Of course he was irritated by this!

“I trusted you! I considered you my friend! But you-” Kilostar truly was quite disgruntled.

“Enough, enough already. It was my bad, alright? But you know, everything is fair game in a battle.” Bertulu chortled again. “Oh, right. How strong are the newbies?”

“The newbies have improved significantly. Six of them made it to the fifth stratum,” Kilostar said.

That very first year after Ning’s arrival, four members of his ‘class’ had made it into the fifth stratum. After a thousand years, two more had joined them.

“As far as how strong they are...” Kilostar paused, weighing his words. “In terms of attack power, the Empress and Darknorth are on par with me. The others including Gorho, Daoist Fish, Fairy Brightheart, and Waterwalker are slightly weaker.”

“Oh?” Bertulu was quite intrigued.

“In terms of defensive prowess, Waterwalker is the strongest freak of all. He probably has some sort of special innate ability that makes him virtually unkillable. Next would be Fairy Brightheart, with Darknorth being third. The Empress, Gorho, and Daoist Fish are ranked below them.”

Kilostar continued, “As for endurance, Darknorth is the strongest. After

him is Fairy Brightheart, Waterwalker, the Empress, then the rest.”

Kilostar nodded. “That would be how I would rank them. They each have their own specialties.” Kilostar smiled. “As for the more detailed information... go try them out yourself.”

Bertulu was intrigued. “From what you are saying, it sounds as though this Darknorth fellow is quite strong?”

“Him? He’s just as much of a bastard as you are.” Kilostar said in a disgruntled manner, “At first, his sword-arts were fairly weak and I was able to crush him with just one warblade. Over the course of the past thousand years, his footwork techniques and his sword-arts both improved dramatically. But the disgusting thing is, he not only has an Elementum Waterflame Gourd, he also has six damn Eternal weapons that are absolutely identical to each other.”

Kilostar shook his head. “You tell me, doesn’t that just piss you off? Although I, Kilostar, have acquired multiple Eternal weapons as well, the only ones that suit me are those two warblades. He actually has SIX of those Eternal swords, and they are absolutely identical!” Kilostar said furiously, “It’s like a six on two fight! And that Elementum Waterflame Gourd continuously releases lightning against me as well...”

Bertulu was surprised. “It sounds as though this Darknorth has quite a few treasures.”

“He has a ridiculous amount of treasures! It’s damn near impossible to get six identical Eternal weapons, and that Elementum Waterflame Gourd has to be worth at least half a million cubes of chaos nectar as well. All combined, that stuff has to be worth more than a million cubes!” Kilostar grumbled unhappily, “If all he had was two swords and if he didn’t have that lightning helping him, I’d still be able to crush him.”

“Oh...” Bertulu nodded upon hearing this.

“Have an idea of what you are going to do?” Kilostar looked at him.

“A few ideas.” Bertulu nodded. “I wanted to first challenge all of the old timers, then sweep through the six newbies. After that, I’ll be leaving.”

“You are going to be leaving the Astral Islands?” Kilostar was briefly stunned, but he then nodded slightly.

“It is time. The reason why I’ve been staying for the past few years was because I wanted to wait for this newest batch of ‘recruits’ to have a chance to grow up,” Bertulu explained. “The almighty Hegemon generally only goes out to personally abduct people roughly once every chaos cycle. I certainly can’t afford to wait that long for the next crop.”

“You bastard, you can break through to become a Daolord whenever you want.” Kilostar shook his head and sighed. “I, unfortunately, have only gained a vague glimpse of what my path is to be. I haven’t truly understand it yet.”

Only by truly discovering one’s own path and discovering one’s own Dao would one be able to rely on that Dao to become a Samsara Daolord.

Bertulu had discovered his path and his Dao long ago. He was able to become a Samsara Daolord whenever he wished it. However, Brightshore Kingdom was a very safe place and he was simply in no rush to make his breakthrough. Once he made that choice, there would be no going back. He naturally wanted to make sure everything was perfect first.

“You will benefit greatly from your time in the Twelve Palaces,” Bertulu said. “Although the Astral Islands have ninety-nine legacies, only the top ten legacies can be considered decent. Strictly speaking, none of these legacies can be considered ‘core’ legacies of the Twelve Palaces.”

“Mm.” Kilostar understood this point as well.

Kilostar lost his battle. His astral island sank from the fifth stratum to the fourth stratum.

After that, Bertulu began an absolute ‘massacre’. He challenged one fifth stratum expert after another, but none of the challenged experts were afraid of him. Bertulu was a person who they normally wouldn’t have a chance to fight. All of them were filled with a towering desire to do battle as they went forth to face Bertulu.

And the end result was...

Every single astral island was smacked down to the fourth stratum.

Originally, the fifth stratum had sixteen islands. It shrank down to fifteen... fourteen... thirteen... twelve...

More and more islands began to fall.

“Yet another island has fallen.” Ning stood at the edges of his own astral island, staring off into the distance as another astral island that had been within his stratum began to sink downwards.

“Mm. My sword-arts have reached a bottleneck, as have my footwork techniques. It’ll be difficult for me to improve any further here in the Astral Islands. Although there are many freaks here for me to fight against, it is still time to leave soon,” Ning mused.

It was time to leave the Astral Islands. Yes, the environment here was nice, and it was possible that over the course of countless years sparring against these monsters he might gain some insights that would allow him to master the seventh stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, but...

That would almost assuredly be something that happened a very, very long time from now. It had taken him nearly five hundred years to master the sixth stance, and if you factored in the temporal acceleration it had actually taken tens of thousands of years. As for the seventh stance, Ning was completely mystified by it. He knew that mastering it would be an incredibly difficult prospect, and it would most likely take him perhaps a thousand times more time and effort.

“I’m under the effects of a lifeblood oath to reach Vastheaven Palace within a chaos cycle. Only then will I be able to return to the Three Realms to bring back my parents. Although a chaos cycle is an extremely long period of time, who knows what new variables might be introduced in the future? I can’t waste too much time here.”

Ning nodded to himself. To have spent a thousand years here in the Astral Islands was enough.

“I should give this footwork legacy to World God Pillsaint.” Ning picked up his golden book, then sent World God Pillsaint a challenge. He was

going to leave and he wouldn't be able to take this jade tome with him. He might as well give it to Pillsaint instead. The first person Ning had met here in the Astral Islands had been Pillsaint, and he had quite a good impression of the man.

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"A challenge?" The rosy-lipped, white-teethed, chubby-faced youth, World God Pillsaint, looked at his book. His eyes lit up. "It is Darknorth."

Ning and Pillsaint were on very good terms with each other.

For example, when Ning didn't wish to battle against a particular foe, but that person insisted on challenging him, Ning would often send World God Pillsaint a challenge and use that duel to avoid the first one.

"Is Darknorth trying to avoid another challenge?" Pillsaint was puzzled. Still, he entered the room filled with divine runes and allowed himself to be teleported directly to the battlegrounds.

This was an icy cold oceanic island that was completely locked in by icebergs. A cold wind howled through this world.

As soon as Pillsaint appeared, he immediately saw the white-robed youth who was carrying that sword on his back.

"Darknorth," Pillsaint immediately called out to him.

"Pillsaint." Ning looked at him. "I'm going to be leaving."

"Leaving?" Pillsaint was stunned. "So soon?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"That's crazy fast. We cultivators live extremely long lives. Why rush things like this? Generally speaking, most of those other freakishly talented geniuses will spend ten million years or a hundred million years here before leaving," Pillsaint said.

Ning laughed. If he stayed here for ten million years, he probably would indeed be able to master the seventh stance of the [Nameless] sword-art. Ten million years out of an entire chaos cycle? That really was nothing. Still, Ning wanted to save as much time as he could, for fear of something

else from happening.

“Time for me to leave. This time, I admit defeat.” Ning spoke out in a high-pitched voice.

“Admit... defeat?” Pillsaint was stunned. Ning had never admitted defeat in any of his battles before. He knew that that Ning had a footwork legacy in his hands. Was Ning planning to transfer this legacy to him?

“I won’t be able to take this footwork legacy away with me. Take it.” Ning tossed the jade tome over to him.

Pillsaint couldn’t control himself. He immediately extended his arms to accept the jade tome, gripping it with his fingers. His eyes couldn’t help but turn red. He had been trapped here in the Astral Islands for an extremely long period of time. He desperately wanted to find a way to leave, but acquiring a full legacy truly was not easy. Whenever he had enough parts of a legacy, he would suffer countless challenges from cultivators on the third and fourth strata. Each time he got close, he would lose it all!

“Darknorth.” Pillsaint’s eyes turned red.

“I’m embarrassed to say this, but I was actually planning to give you a sword-art legacy I acquired quite some time ago. Unfortunately, Waterwalker managed to force it out of me.” Ning shook his head.

“Darknorth, I’m endlessly grateful that you are willing to help me out. You’ve been here for less than a thousand years, right? It hasn’t been a long time at all.” Pillsaint was quite moved. With this legacy, he would regain his freedom.

“Alright. Once I leave, I’ll be joining the Palace of the Sword of the Twelve Palaces,” Ning said. “If you wish to meet me, go to the Sword Palace and seek me out.”

“I will.” World God Pillsaint nodded vigorously.

“And now... the only thing that remains is my battle against Bertulu.” Ning had a distant look in his eyes. The last thing he wanted to do before leaving this place was to have a battle against Bertulu.

Bertulu, the undisputed number one expert of the hundreds of thousands of astral islands. Ever since he had made it to the sixth stratum, he had never fallen down from it.

Ning had battled against all the other talented geniuses. He had never, however, battled Bertulu.

“I really look forward to it.” Ning could feel his blood boiling with eagerness just thinking about this battle.



# Chapter 43: The Hegemon

Ji Ning was looking forward to battling Bertulu. After fighting with him, he could leave the Astral Islands with no regrets. However, he had to wait for Bertulu to finish challenging the old timers first.

The number of astral islands in the fifth stratum continued to decreased. Eight. Seven. Six. Five.

Only five were left! These were the five newcomers.

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"I lost." The handsome, devilish-looking silver-haired youth stared at the white-robed, white-haired youth in the distance. Both had extraordinary auras. The former had a more devilish aura while the latter had an aura of warmth and calm.

"Gorho, it seems as though you have already found your own path to becoming a Samsara Daolord." Bertulu smiled as he spoke.

"Yes." It was very rare for Gorho to feel admiration towards someone else. Although Darknorth and Kilostar had defeated him, he didn't really care too much. This was because he could tell that Kilostar had mainly succeeded due to having a thousand clones, while Darknorth had a body just as tough as Kilostar's and most likely had a similar technique he relied on. In terms of actual insights into the Dao, neither Darknorth nor Kilostar were up to his level.

However, Bertulu gave Gorho a sense of tremendous pressure! This was the first time he had encountered someone who completely outclassed him in terms of enlightenment and insights.

"What path do you plan to walk?" Bertulu asked with curiosity.

"If I have the chance, I will walk the path of spacetime," Gorho said.

"Spacetime? Isn't your strongest Dao the Dao of Fire?" Bertulu was puzzled. From the battle they had just engaged in, he was able to tell that Gorho had reached incredible heights in the Dao of Fire. In fact, he had reached the level of being able to use it to become a Samsara Daolord

whenever he wished.

“I like it, I guess.” This was Gorho’s response, but in his heart he mused to himself...

My true talent actually lies in spacetime. My strongest Dao isn’t necessarily my best Dao.

He was the most powerful descendant of an almighty Aeonian, King Gorsch. He naturally was extremely skilled in the Dao of Fire... but he was even more skilled in spacetime! However, he was personally trained in the mysteries of fire by King Gorsch, whereas he had to study the art of spacetime by himself. This was why his Dao of Fire was slightly superior to his Dao of Spacetime.

However, by comparison he had to put twice as much effort into his Dao of Fire, only to get half the results. Prior to him being abducted, his father King Gorsch had told Gorho that he was planning to help Gorho find a master who was skilled in the Dao of Spacetime to teach him.

“But how could any major power possibly be a match for the almighty Hegemon of the Brightshore Kingdom?” After years of painstaking work, Gorho had finally managed to acquire a complete spacetime legacy roughly two years ago. “According to the notes on that legacy, if I reach a high enough level of skill I will be able to receive personal guidance from the Hegemon himself.”

“Once I become a Daolord and Awaken my bloodline, I’ll become even more powerful. By then, not even Bertulu would necessarily be a match for me.” Gorho’s heart was filled with tremendous pride and self-confidence.

Prior to their Awakening, Aeonians were quite similar to cultivators. After being Awakened, however, they would explode with power and would view other Samsara Daolords as prey for them to feed out. They truly were terrifyingly powerful.

Yet another astral island descended from the fifth stratum. Now, only four remained.

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“My techniques were completely ineffective against you.” The special lifeform known as Daoist Fish let out a sigh. His face was covered with fish scales and his eyes gleamed with golden light.

“You have too many techniques. You need to focus a bit more.” Bertulu was gleaming with light, as dazzling as any sun. Slowly, he began to retract his aura of radiance.

“I know that, but... I can’t help it. I like them all.” Daoist Fish let out a sigh. “Ugh. I can play around with any of those individuals on the third and fourth strata as I please, but each time I fight someone else on the fifth level I’m beaten.”

Daoist Fish was one of the last to join the fifth stratum, and he was the only one who was in the fourth stratum at the time of this challenge.

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“How can this be?” This was a bald woman who was dazzlingly beautiful but who had a demeanor as cold as ice. Right now, a look of absolute shock was on her face. “How could you have...”

“Fairy Brightheart, your defensive techniques are indeed quite formidable, and I am filled with admiration towards you. But that heart of yours... it really is a major weakness. Any World-level Heartforce Cultivator would be able to easily defeat you, to say nothing of me.” Bertulu let out a soft sigh.

Fairy Brightheart’s face turned slightly pale.

Deep within her innermost heart there lay a nightmare that she had never been able to forget. However, it was also thanks to this nightmare that she had been able to persevere and reach her current heights in cultivation.

“I understand.” Fairy Brightheart nodded slowly.

The four islands became three islands.

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“Fighting with you was a wonderful experience. You forced me to go all

out.” Bertulu looked at the jade-haired woman before him. This was the Empress.

Empress was dressed in semi-translucent gauze and looked quite bewitching. She let out a soft laugh. “Bertulu, everyone knows that although you are skilled in the Dao of Light, you are even more skilled in heartforce. Just now, you didn’t use your heartforce at all. You were able to defeat me merely through employing your Dao of Light.”

“In close combat abilities, at least, I was forced to use my full power,” Bertulu said. “You are extremely talented. However, you are a bit lacking in terms of your insights into the Dao. If you were to reach a higher level in this regard, perhaps to Gorho’s level, then I would be forced to use my heartforce techniques in order to defeat you.”

The three islands became two islands.

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“How incredibly powerful.” Waterwalker stared at Bertulu, his eyes filled with shock and awe. “I fell asleep before we even started our fight?”

“You should’ve been born just a short while ago, right?” Bertulu looked at Waterwalker.

“Yes. The almighty Hegemon captured me just moments after I woke up.” Waterwalker nodded.

“Your innate abilities are amongst the most supreme abilities any race of special lifeforms possess. Most likely, even the Empress is a bit inferior to you in this regard. Your innate abilities are so strong that I imagine you are close to being on par with even the legendary Ancient cultivators or the Brightshore Imperials.” Bertulu continued, “By relying on your innate abilities, you can ensure that the other geniuses here are completely unable to injure you. That alone ensures that you can defeat cultivators on the fourth and fifth strata.”

“However... the problem with you is that you simply haven’t been alive for long enough. Spend some extra time here in the Astral Islands. I recommend you spend a chaos cycle here, then spend another chaos cycle

wandering the Brightshore Kingdom,” Bertulu said. “Only then should you join the Twelve Palaces.”

“Although I don’t really understand why I have to stay here that long, I can sense that you have nothing but the best of intentions in mind for me.” Waterwalker looked at Bertulu. “From this day forth, you are one of my friends.”

“Haha, good!” Bertulu nodded.

When he looked at Waterwalker, he felt as though he was looking at himself all those years ago. The only difference was that Waterwalker had been abducted shortly after being born, whereas Bertulu himself had wandered the primordial chaos for countless years and had experienced many, many things. He had experienced both grief and joy, gatherings and partings. All of these things had come together to allow him to walk the path of heartforce.

The two islands became one.

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Only a single astral island was now left within the fifth stratum. Ji Ning’s astral island.

“Am I the last one?” The white-robed Ning was seated in the lotus position atop a grassy area within his astral island, Violetjewel resting across his knees. He had been waiting here for quite some time now, but Bertulu had unexpectedly chosen to save him for last.

“Here it comes.” Ning’s gaze turned towards the golden book next to him.

A challenge had finally appeared within his golden book, a challenge that came from the sixth stratum. This was a challenge Ning had never received before.

“I’ve spent a thousand years in the Astral Islands waiting for this battle.” Ning sent out a strand of his will, shattering the message of challenge. Challenge accepted!

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“Wow.”

“That guy in the sixth stratum is truly invincible.”

“He’s way too powerful.”

All the islands of the Astral Islands had been in a state of breathless excitement for the past fifteen days. They had watched as one island after another descended from the fifth stratum. Every single person within the fifth stratum was a freak of a genius, no matter what path they walked or what Dao they were skilled yet. And yet, Bertulu had crushed and defeated all of them!

Only a single island remained within the fifth stratum. Once this island was also defeated, there would be no islands in the fifth stratum at all.

At this moment in time, all of the hundreds of thousands of cultivators present here were completely focused on what was going to happen. They were awaiting the final resolution to this momentous event.

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At the very bottom of the dark abyss below the Astral Islands.

At this moment there were more than ten figures gathered here, including that of the muscular man with tousled black hair who was dressed in simple combat garbs. Their auras were as profound as that of the endless sea of stars.

“Bertulu truly is formidable in heartforce.”

“This should be his final battle in the Astral Islands.”

“After he finishes sweeping through all his opponents, he will probably leave.”

“He still has yet to tell us if he will be joining the Palace of Radiance or the Palace of Heartforce.”

These ancient powers were all chatting amongst themselves. All of them had been keeping an eye on Bertulu for quite some time now. In fact, even

the almighty Hegemon had been paying attention to him.

The path of cultivation had three main branches; Fiendgod Body Refining, Ki Refining, and Heartforce Cultivating. Ji Ning was a dual refiner who trained both as a Fiendgod and as a Ki Refiner! However, it was actually possible to be a triple refiner who trained in heartforce as well! Bertulu was one such cultivator, and people like him were the most terrifying opponents one could face. If Bertulu could use his heartforce to even slightly affect his opponent, he would then be able to easily dominate that person through his terrifying close combat skills. In fact, there were many who Bertulu could defeat without even having to lift a finger!

“Oh, just one battle is left?” A voice rang out.

A white-bearded elder dressed in snowy robes who had six curved horns on his head suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

The ten-plus ancient powers gathered here were all shocked. They hastily bowed with respect. “Hegemon!”

# Chapter 44: Ji Ning Battles Bertulu

The almighty Hegemon, the most exalted figure in all the Brightshore Kingdom.

Because of him, the Brightshore Kingdom sprang into existence. Because of him, there existed the Brightshore Imperials and the Twelve Palaces of Brightshore. Because of him, the kingdom was qualified to stand alongside the Dao Alliance and the Aeonian Kingdom as one of the most supreme powers of the Endless Territories. In front of him, even the most unruly of ancient powers would have to bow their heads.

“How is the latest batch of newcomer kids doing?” The six-horned, white-bearded old man slowly sauntered towards them. Spacetime began to congeal and condense in the area around him. Although he wasn’t intentionally flaring his aura, the tiny bit of it that was naturally leaking out of him was more than enough to make all the members of the imperial clan or the Twelve Palace to feel as though they could barely breathe.

“The newbies? That kid named Waterwalker has superb innate gifts. The others are a bit lacking by comparison.” An incredibly muscular golden-armored man spoke out. This man was a bit excessively muscular. Even though he had already shrank down from his true size, his arms were still thicker than his head. There was clearly a bit of a mismatch in proportions. “Bertulu himself said that Waterwalker’s innate gifts are comparable to the gifts of us Imperials or those Ancient cultivators.”

“His innate gifts are indeed quite good. Unfortunately, he doesn’t really understand anything.” The white-bearded elder nodded slowly.

“As for those geniuses which Bertulu just battled against, he was able to defeat them all with ease. None of them can even compare to him.” The muscular golden-armored man laughed. “Hegemon, Bertulu truly is quite talented in the Dao of Light. Let him enter our Palace of Radiance! I can promise that I’ll take him on as my personal disciple and provide him personal guidance.”



This muscular man was an incredibly famous figure in the Endless Territories known as Daolord Thousand Waves. He was one of the two Palace Lords of the Radiant Palace, a figure who was capable of causing tremendous waves within the Endless Territories.

“There are so few Heartforce Cultivators. Thousand Waves, why must you fight with me over one?” A figure covered in black robes spoke out in an ancient voice.

“Your Palace of Heartforce barely has any Daolords in it.” Daolord Thousandwaves spoke in an utterly indomitable fashion.

“Although we are few in number, each of us has the power of ten or a hundred men,” the illusory, formless figure underneath the black robes said.

“Oh? The power of ten? Then why don’t you have someone in your Heartforce Palace come spar with me a bit?” Light began to gather within the eyes of Daolord Thousand Waves.

The black-robed figure was instantly rendered speechless.

Daolord Thousand Waves was one of the top ten experts of all the Twelve Palaces. If the Palace Lord of the Heartforce Palace was around, he might give Thousand Waves a run for his money, but he was out wandering the endless primordial chaos and hadn’t returned in more than ten chaos cycles. At present, there really was no one in the Heartforce Palace who was a match for Daolord Thousand Waves.

“When the time comes for Bertulu to make his choice, the two of you can do your best to recruit him.” The white-bearded elder smiled. “I won’t get involved. Enough. These two kids are about to start their duel.”

Rumble...

A series of moving images appeared in the air next to them. This was what was occurring within the dueling island. Ji Ning and Bertulu had just met each other.

“Darknorth isn’t bad either. Unfortunately, his opponent is Bertulu.”

“I wonder how long he will be able to hold on for?”

“That entirely depends on how long Bertulu wishes to play around for.”

This was what all the major powers were saying.

They truly had very high opinions of Bertulu. It must be understood that the Astral Islands had helped train many groups of geniuses over the course of countless years, but it had been an extremely long period of time since someone had excited them as much as Bertulu. This was because Bertulu simply had an incredible level of insight into the Dao. It could be said that as soon as he broke through to become a Daolord of the First Step, he would instantly become capable of matching Daolords of the Third Step.

If he spent a little bit of time training and became a Daolord of the Second Step, he would be capable of battling Verge-level Daolords!

Although others such as Gorho were also capable of becoming Daolords whenever they wished, no one in the Twelve Palaces really cared about him, even though they knew that he was an Aeonian! So what if he was an Aeonian? Even Eternal Emperor Melobo of the Aeonians had been severely beaten and chased around by Daolord Allgod.

Gorho's level of enlightenment was far inferior to Bertulu's.

“Bertulu really is at the point where he should be breaking through to the Daolord level soon.” A look of anticipation was in the white-bearded elder's eyes.

All the major powers were staring at the midair images, watching as the battle was about to begin.

.....

The oceanic island.

A white-robed youth who carried a sword on his back was staring off into the distance. He saw a white-robed, white-haired youth off in the distance, a youth whose eyes seemed to contain the all the stars of the cosmos. When Ning saw those eyes, he couldn't help but be affected by

their power.

“Incredible.” Ning was secretly speechless.

“Darknorth, my name is Bertulu.” The white-haired youth spoke out.

“Bertulu. I’ve heard of you, and I’ve been waiting for this battle for quite some time,” Ning said. For some reason, although they had yet to fight Ning already felt a sense of tremendous pressure. “The stronger he is, the better. I want to see how powerful a World-level cultivator can become.”

“You should be the strongest individual in the group of newcomers.” Bertulu smiled. “I hope you won’t disappoint me.”

“Then take out your weapon,” Ning said.

“Take out my weapon?” Bertulu smiled. “Let’s see if you are strong enough first.”

Although this was Ning’s first time meeting Bertulu, he had heard long ago that Bertulu generally used his bare palms when fighting in close combat. The only time he had ever used his weapons was in his battles against Kilostar! This was Kilostar’s evaluation: “Only once you fight him yourself will you truly understand how powerful he is. He is powerful enough to drive a man into despair. Only by using my thousand bodies formation am I able to make it so that he can do nothing to me.”

Whoosh.

Ning stood there atop a mountain boulder. His body momentarily blurred as he manifested three heads and six arms, a sword in each of his six hands.

“Hahaha...” Bertulu laughed, then began to stride through the air towards Ning. As he did so, he delivered a punch from far away.

Boom! His punch seemed to strike out with the power of a meteor as its power crushed through Heaven and Earth, slamming down towards Ning from the air.

Ning’s face tightened slightly, the desire to do battle growing even stronger in his heart. His opponent was fighting empty-handed, while he

himself was using six Eternal swords. He had a huge advantage in this fight. “I have to force him to take out his weapons.”

Whoosh. Ning’s sword moved, transforming into a streak of absolutely dominating blood-colored light as it struck out against that fist.

Although it seemed to merely graze Bertulu’s fist, it instantly was able to have an impact on his fist technique.

“Oh? Interesting.” Bertulu laughed as he continued to stride forwards. He manifested six arms as well, then began to rain down blows with his fists like countless meteors shooting through the skies. His palms were like massive screens that blotted out the skies, and his fingers seemed to tear through everything in the world. Even though he still merely used his bare hands, his six hands were still strong enough to put pressure upon Ning with each strike. As for Ning, his pride prevented him from using his Elementum Waterflame Gourd.

Although Bertulu was strong, he was fighting empty-handed. Ning was already using six Eternal weapons against Bertulu’s bare hands; how could Ning possibly take out the gourd as well? If he lost in a situation like this, he would be thoroughly convinced of the latter’s superiority.

Rumble...

Bertulu circled around Ning at high speeds as he attacked, his aura flaring out and filling the heavens with each strike.

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“Each time I watch Bertulu fight, I enjoy myself immensely.”

“Right. I truly would never have imagined that a World-level cultivator could reach such a high level of insight.”

The ancient powers in the dark abyss all sighed as they watched this battle go on.

The white-bearded elder nodded slowly. “When Dawnstar was at the World level, his saber-arts were comparable to Bertulu’s fist techniques. However, Dawnstar was merely a dual refiner who did not train in

heartforce.”

“Dawnstar?”

“Palace Lord Dawnstar?”

“He was this powerful as well?”

“No wonder Palace Lord Dawnstar is so powerful now.”

All the ancient powers nodded.

Without question, the most powerful Daolord of the Twelve Palaces was Palace Lord Dawnstar. He was the Palace Lord of the Palace of the Saber. Although he was ‘merely’ a Verge-level Daolord, on one occasion when he was enraged he had slain an ancient Eternal Emperor with just three strokes of his saber. His reputation was instantly spread throughout the Endless Territories! He was so dominantly powerful that he was even stronger than Daolord Allgod had been.

For the Hegemon to compare Bertulu to Palace Lord Dawnstar was a sign of how great his expectations were for Bertulu.

.....

Rumble...

Although Bertulu repeatedly circled around Ning and furiously assaulted him, he was unable to injure Ning in the slightest.

“If that’s all you have, you won’t even be able to scratch me,” Ning said coldly.

“You are indeed worthy of making me use a weapon.” A sword suddenly appeared in each of Bertulu’s hands, and each sword was an Eternal weapon. The area around him became filled with endless flickers of light, and Bertulu himself was like the divine lord of the lights as he once more charged at Ning with those six swords at the ready.

His swords struck out in a fierce, dominating fashion. Ning was forced to defend with all his might.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

“What powerful sword-arts! Still, the stronger he is the better.” Ning only grew even more excited. The Thunderlight Wings suddenly appeared on his back, bolstering his footwork techniques. Each flutter of the wings and each step Ning took was like a stance from a sword-art. His movements and his attacks had all joined together into a perfect whole.

Ning struck out with his six Violetjewels simultaneously, transforming them into six streaks of bloody light that slashed out through the skies. Each time, he was able to defend against Bertulu’s swords.

“He was actually able to defend against me?” Bertulu was rather startled. He called out, “What is your sword-art named?”

“During my thousand years here at the Astral Islands, I merged the Unicorn’s Heart stance with my Astral stance and created a defensive technique,” Ning replied. “I named it the Unicorn’s Domain!”

“Unicorn’s Domain?” Bertulu was slightly surprised.

The Unicorn’s Domain represented Ning’s most profound insights into the Dao of the Sword.

The Unicorn’s Heart represented a certain level of insight into the sword that was focused on defense. Much like how the Heartsword stance represented the heart having full control of the sword and the world around it, or the Great Firmanent stance represented the power of an entire world, this stance represented a type of domain that was even more profound than the Unicorn’s Heart. Ning had used the essence of the Unicorn’s Heart and fused it with the even more powerful Astral stance to create this domain, his Unicorn’s Domain!

He was able to defend against any attacks that entered this domain. Each time, his defenses were able to deflect and then counterattack the enemy. The Astral stance was merely a ‘tool’ in that using it with Violetjewel resulted in tremendous gains in power. For him to incorporate it into his Unicorn’s Domain and use it to defend or deflect just made the power of the domain even greater and more effective.

By relying on this technique, Ning had been able to finally defeat the fisherman in the third Mirrorsnow Painting. However, Ning’s sword-arts

had since reached a true bottleneck, which was why he had decided to leave the Astral islands.

“This is the most powerful sword-art I have at present,” Ning said. “Bertulu, I’ve already activated my Unicorn’s Domain. If you can defeat this domain of mine, I will admit defeat.”

“Haha, good. Aside from Kilostar, you are the only person in all the Astral Islands capable of forcing me to use my true weapons.” Suddenly, the six swords vanished from Bertulu’s hands. Moments later, two heavy warhammers appeared. One warhammer was black while the other was white, and both were Eternal weapons.

“Judging from the fist techniques you used earlier, I actually guessed that you specialize in something aside from sword-arts. It seems as though my guess was correct. You actually specialize in hammer-arts, using your hands as your hammers, right? Come. Let us see if you can break my Unicorn’s Domain.” Ning had absolute confidence in his Unicorn’s Domain. This was a technique which was perfect for a weaker cultivator to defend against a stronger foe with. It was a defensive sword-art that avoiding facing a stronger foe’s attacks head-on.

# Chapter 45: True Body?

The ancient powers watched the images of the battle from their position in the dark abyss.

“He’s infused an attacking sword-art into a defensive domain, but managed to keep the essence of his domain intact.” A partially bald man let out a laugh. “Although Darknorth isn’t a match for Bertulu, he’s still quite a rare talent. Once he enters our Palace of the Sword, we’ll give him some good training. Perhaps a miracle will happen and he will be able to be Bertulu’s equal in the future.”

“Has this kid even chosen your Sword Palace yet? Even if he has, should really be so shameless in praising him? His sword-arts aren’t bad and have reached incredible heights in terms of defensiveness, but for him to be Bertulu’s match in the future? Haha, how many Bertulus do you think our Brightshore Kingdom will give rise to?”

“Daolord Woodflower, you are going a bit too far in your praise.”

“Well, Woodflower belongs to the Sword Palace. It isn’t surprising for him to praise someone else who will be in his palace.”

“I do have to admit that Darknorth’s defensive abilities are quite excellent.”

The ancient powers all gave their own opinions as they watched Ning and Bertulu continue to furiously battle against each other.

.....

Rumble...

It was as though the world itself was breaking apart. Space had been shattered and distorted, and each of those two warhammers carried enough power to cause this entire world to tremble. Ning had to use three or four swords to block each attack; for him to use just a single sword was no longer enough.

“Although he is skilled in using heavy warhammers, I imagine he only has two of these Eternal warhammers.” Ning was able to hang on with



some difficulty.

Actually, it was with quite a bit of difficulty.

Bertulu was most skilled in hammer-arts, and he sent his attacks forward in an open, straightforward, and awe-inspiring display of power! Ning was being completely crushed in this fight, and he was only able to just barely survive because his newly developed Unicorn Domain allowed him to perfectly execute every strike and avoid facing the power of each hammer head on.

“His hammer-art is so profound that I can’t even understand it. Although the golden-robed emperor in the Mirrorsnow Painting also had an open and straightforward fighting style, there is obviously an enormous difference between the two of them!” Ning couldn’t help but sigh. If the golden-robed emperor was described as a child who had just learned to walk, then Bertulu was a valiant warrior who bounded to and fro with the fierceness of a tiger.

Fortunately, Ning had infused his Astral stance into this Unicorn’s Domain. Otherwise, if he was merely relying on the Unicorn’s Heart stance, he would have been completely unable to withstand this assault.

“You are actually still able to hold on?” Bertulu was slightly startled as well. He then called out, “Watch out, Darknorth!”

“Eh?” Ning’s face tightened slightly.

Rumble...

The world around him suddenly changed.

Previously, he had been on an oceanic island that was surrounded by an endless sea. Although the island had begun to crumble from the effects of their fight, the endless waters of the sea hadn’t changed.

However, Ning now realized to his astonishment that the world around him had completely changed. It had become a world of rolling plains and towering mountains, and at the very peak of one mountain there was a sacred shrine that glowed with breathtaking light, allowing the great plains to bask in its radiance.

As for Ning and Bertulu, they were battling within the plains.

“Ning, son.”

Yuchi Snow and Ji Yichuan both appeared. They were staring at Ning, eyes filled with joy.

“Junior apprentice-brother.” Yu Wei appeared as well.

A surge of invisible power had been applied to Ning’s truesoul, pulling his deepest desires and most sacred memories out from the bottom of his heart. Ning’s heart was forever occupied with his longing for his father, his mother, and for Yu Wei. They had been the most important people in his life, and he deeply desired to one day rescue Yu Wei and allow their family of three to reunite.

“Break!” Ning continued to battle furiously against Bertulu, not allowing any of this to affect him in the slightest. He let out a furious roar, causing Yuchi Snow, Ji Yichuan, and Yu Wei to all vanish.

“He actually wasn’t affected by it.” Bertulu was a bit surprised.

“What a powerful heartforce illusion. Eh?” Ning’s face turned slightly pale as he realized that he was still surrounded by rolling plains and towering mountains.

Ever since the Endwar of the Three Realms, Ning’s Dao-heart had continuously risen and grown more powerful. As he mastered the Heartsword stance, his own heartforce had reached the threshold of the fifth stage of heartforce. The problem was that he was still just a hair away from making that breakthrough. Although his heartforce was quite strong, it was nothing compared to Bertulu’s heartforce illusions.

However, Ning’s strongest aspect was his truesoul! His truesoul was bathed in the power of the azureflower mist energy, causing it to be comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step.

Anyone who wished to successfully bewilder Ning would have to overwhelm his truesoul with a heartforce technique or some other secret art. Take Eternal Emperors for example. Eternal Emperors might go insane or berserk in some instances, but to shake their truesouls would be

almost impossibly hard. Ning's truesoul was incredibly powerful, and he had decently strong heartforce as well. This was why he had been able to withstand the illusions just now.

"Come forth! As Bertulu continued to battle against Ning, he suddenly let out a loud shout.

Boom!

The plains around them suddenly split apart. Many long chains began to fly out from within the crevices and spin towards Ning.

"More illusions? Break!" Ning willed his powerful truesoul and mighty will to cause all these things to dissipate.

"Haha, illusions? You underestimate us Heartforce Cultivators. What is illusory is real, what is real is illusory." Bertulu shook his head. "What you are seeing is all real."

Ning had no time to do anything else. Swoosh! A crimson-black gourd suddenly appeared next to him, then released two streaks of lightning that shot out like dragons. One streak of lightning caused dark stormclouds to gather as it shot out, with the other causing crimson clouds of flame to appear around it. The two swept out against the surroundings, incinerating and shattering the chains that had sought to bind Ning. Alas, the chains reformed after being broken apart and continued to attack Ning in an endless stream.

The two streaks of Dao lightning destroyed everything in the surrounding area, and Ning was like the god of lightning himself. Even Bertulu, who had been fighting Ning in close combat, was impacted by the lightning.

"Omnipresence." Bertulu said this word calmly.

Whoosh.

Instantly, golden light began to emanate from every single part of the plains. Endless streams of golden light surrounded Ning, constricting him and slowing him down. The two streaks of Dao lightly furiously hammered down upon the light, but it was omnipresent and inescapable.

“Attack!” Ning took direct control over the two streaks of Dao lightning, sending them sweeping out against everything around him in a net.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The warhammers continued their dance, causing the earth to shake and the mountains to tremble.

Ning’s swords continuously formed Unicorn’s Domains, allowing him to defend with some difficulty. Thankfully, Ning had the azureflower mist energy supporting him, giving him the strength to withstand his foe.

“Let’s stop here.” Bertulu suddenly retreated.

The rolling plains and towering mountains around them all vanished, as did the shrine atop the mountain. The surrounding area returned to its normal, ‘real’ appearance. The island had long ago been completely reduced to rubble. The two were standing in the middle of the air, surrounded by the endless waves of the ocean.

“Stop?” Ning was slightly surprised.

Even though he had taken out his Elementum Waterflame Gourd, he still found it extremely hard to hold on. He could sense that defeat might come at any moment, but he had continued to do his best to delay the inevitable for as long as he could.

“I admit defeat,” Bertulu suddenly said in a loud voice.

“You admit what?” Ning was stunned. His foe’s hammer-arts were incredibly, incredibly profound. In addition, Ning could sense that Bertulu hadn’t really been going all-out in the fight; he had simply been fighting in a fairly casual, relaxed matter. Despite that, Ning had been able to sense that he was going to lose soon, if for no other reason than the fact that he was perpetually on the defense and unable to launch any attacks of his own.

“I promised Kilostar that I would transfer this heartforce legacy over to him.” Bertulu suddenly produced a single white feather. “This duel was my final duel. After this, I will be leaving the Astral Islands. Before leaving, I wanted to hand this heartforce legacy over to you. After you learn it,

challenge Kilostar and transfer it to him.”

As he spoke, he sent the white plume flying towards Ning.

“...Oh.” Ning accepted the plume blankly. This white plume was the heartforce legacy that was ranked number one amongst the ninety-nine legacies. It had been in Bertulu’s hands all this time.

“But you obviously were stronger than me...” Ning stared at Bertulu.

“There’s no need for me to be so stubborn about a mere duel in the Astral Islands.” Bertulu laughed calmly.

“But... you are a special lifeform! You haven’t even revealed your true form.” Ning couldn’t help but argue back.

He had battled against quite a few special lifeforms in recent years. He knew that these special lifeforms had all used shapeshifting techniques to take a humanoid form. Cultivators were generally humanoids, and they were the most numerous living creatures in all the Endless Territories. However, special lifeforms who were in human form were often only able to unleash perhaps ten to twenty percent of their true power. Once they revealed their true forms, they would become far more powerful.

If they also possessed powerful innate abilities, they would become even more freakishly strong once they assumed their true forms.

“My true form?” Bertulu laughed as he glanced at Ning. “I’ve never shown my true form in the Astral Islands.”

“Exit,” Bertulu called out. Instantly, spacetime twisted around him and caused him to vanish.

Ning just stood there blankly, that white plume in his hands. He had won, right? Then why did he feel so pissed off? He hadn’t even had the chance to see Bertulu’s true form.

.....

The bottom of the dark abyss. The ancient powers were still watching.

“I once saw Bertulu’s true form. The first time I saw him, I misidentified him as an Ancient cultivator.” Daolord Thousand Waves let out a loud

laugh. “This kid has never used his true body in any of his duels in the Astral Islands. Each time, he’s only used his human form.”

“Given the level of his insights, if he uses his true form he would probably be able to slay Daolords of the First Step right now.”

“He should be at the absolute maximum level of power, theoretical or otherwise, for any World-level cultivator.”

Ancient cultivators as well as the Brightshore Imperials represented the ultimate heights of racial power. They were very rare in number, but they possessed utterly unearthly levels of power. Waterwalker was a special lifeform who was comparable to Ancient cultivators in power, while Bertulu possessed similarly strong innate gifts. If he truly did reveal his true body, he would instantly become more than ten times as powerful!

“Alright. Bertulu has already decided to leave the Astral Islands.” The white-bearded elder laughed merrily. “It will be up to the two of you to convince him to join either the Palace of Radiance or the Palace of Heartforce.”

Laughing, the white-bearded old man turned and walked away, disappearing into the darkness.

“Time to go.”

“Hurry!”

“Daolord Thousand Waves, the Heartforce Palace really does need more Daolords! We don’t have enough!”

The many Daolords quickly flew out of the dark abyss and towards the astral islands in the sky.

# Chapter 46: Heartforce Legacy

“How is this possible?” Kilostar stared in astonishment from within his own astral island. The highest astral island, the island within the sixth stratum, was actually descending?

“No way.”

“How can this be?”

“How could Bertulu have lost?”

“Darknorth beat Bertulu? Is this some kind of joke?”

All the other defeated geniuses, be they cultivators, Aeonians, or special lifeforms, were all in a state of disbelief. They all knew how powerful Bertulu was, which was why they completely refused to believe that he could’ve been defeated!

Hundreds of thousands of cultivators watched as Bertulu’s island descended from the exalted sixth stratum. All of them were equally stunned.

There were currently two islands that floated within the fifth stratum. Ji Ning was seated within his own island, and he was mumbling to himself. “He lost on purpose? Did he think I’d be really happy once I won? I didn’t even get to see his true form...” Ning didn’t feel any excitement at this ‘victory’, because he knew his opponent had thrown the fight.

“Still... I didn’t expect to get a copy of the heartforce legacy before leaving.” Ning waved his hand, causing that white plume to appear.

The white plume was incredibly beautiful. This single feather was actually formed from 3600 strands of silk. Ning sent his senses into it, discovering the legacy hiding within it.

“Although I didn’t expect to acquire it, being able to learn it is a decent stroke of luck.” Ning immediately swore the oath required of him, allowing an enormous flood of complicated information to flood into his mind.

Although Ning had some talent for the water, lightning, and heartforce, he hadn't really been planning on spending too much effort on them. There was a limit to how much energy he had, and he had chosen to pour it all into his Dao of the Sword. His advantage in this field was far greater than in the other fields, and he naturally wanted to focus more on it.

As for those other Daos, once he had some more leisure time or once he reached an unbreachable bottleneck in the Dao of the Sword, he would slowly spend some time getting his other Daos up to speed. Daolord Allgod was a good example. Only after becoming a Verge-level Daolord had he chosen to start studying the Dao of the Sword. By then, his overall level of understanding regarding the Dao was so great that he was able to train quite quickly in his secondary or tertiary Daos.

Once Ji Ning became a Verge-level Daolord, he would probably be able to reach the early Daolord level in water in just one day. After that, his training would also proceed quite quickly. It was entirely possible that he'd be able to progress to the Verge in water as well. But of course, if his innate affinity for a Dao was low, training in it would be extremely slow. Daolord Allgod had spent an tremendous amount of effort in order to upgrade his skill in the Dao of the Sword to the early Daolord level, which was why he himself had declared that he simply had no talent for the Dao of the Sword at all.

"I would probably have to spend a hundred times as much effort in training in the Dao of Water in order to make it comparable to my Dao of the Sword, and it wouldn't even help me that much. If I put all that work into the sword instead, I'll improve far more." Ning understood this quite well.

A long period of time passed. Finally, Ning finished memorizing the heartforce legacy. It truly was the top legacy of the ninety-ninety legacies of the Astral Islands, and it contained a correspondingly enormous amount of information.

"So this is what being a true Heartforce Cultivator is all about." Ning was stupefied.



He finally understood.

Heartforce could be divided into six stages. The first five stages were essentially the stages which Houyi had described.

The first stage was the elementary level. It was extremely hard to reach the first level; if you couldn't succeed in it, you would have no hope of progressing as a Heartforce Cultivator.

The second stage, 'iceheart'.

The third stage, 'ruler'.

The fourth stage, 'mortal dust'.

Ning had reached the mortal dust level long ago during the Crimsonbright Realmwar. Even though the Endwar and its various battles had an enormous impact on Ning, and he had reached the threshold of the fifth stage after seeing so many of the major powers of the Three Realms die. Alas, he still stubbornly clung on to certain things and was unable to truly let go.

The fifth stage, 'truth'. This was a very high level of heartforce for most cultivators. To reach this level was extremely difficult! Strength didn't have much to do with it. Although many powerful cultivators had gained their power through enormous mental tempering and stress, resulting in them possessing powerful hearts, there were many special lifeforms such as Waterwalker who were born with incredible power but who had very weak hearts. Waterwalker hadn't even reached the elementary stage of heartforce.

The sixth stage, 'world'. This was the highest level of heartforce!

"After your heartforce reaches the stage of 'truth', you will be able to see through the truth of all things. Your heartforce will transform, allowing all your thoughts and desires to coalesce into a sea of consciousness. You will then be able to establish your own heartworld," Ning murmured softly to himself.

Finally, he understood.

Prior to reaching the sixth stage, heartforce could only be used in fairly crude ways. In the Endless Territories, Old Man Yuan would be considered a Heartforce Cultivator by Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals, but technically speaking he wasn't a true Heartforce Cultivator. He was just someone who understood certain heartforce secret arts, but those arts were enough for quite a few Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals to refer to him as a Heartforce Cultivator.

Actually World-level Heartforce Cultivators were incredibly rare. There was simply no way for someone like Old Man Yuan to rely on heartforce to reach the World level.

Once your heartforce reached the sixth stage, all of your heartforce would pool together within that sea of consciousness. If your heartforce was strong enough, it could affect reality itself, forming a singularity where what was real and what was false would collide. A single grain of sand could become an entire real world.

"Ki Refiners cultivate Immortal ki and the Dao-tree in their bodies will continuously grow taller.

"Fiendgod Body Refiners cultivate divine power and their divine bodies will continuously grow stronger.

"Heartforce Cultivators cultivate their worlds. They need to establish their heartworlds, with their insights into the Dao perfecting those worlds and making them more and more real."

Ning murmured softly, "Heartforce Cultivators truly are unique."

These were three completely different paths of cultivation.

By comparison, Heartforce Cultivators didn't need to gain incredibly profound insights into the Dao. What they needed to do was to slowly build up their heartworlds, allowing their heartworlds to become increasingly like real worlds. Only when their heartworlds became sufficiently stable could they be expanded... but it was possible for heartworlds to become greater than entire territories in size. In fact, they could become greater than a hundred territories!

The larger a heartworld was, the more powerful a Heartforce Cultivator was! This was because all the World energy within this heartworld would be available to the Heartforce Cultivator to command. If the heartworld was the size of a territory, then its 'heartworld projection' alone would be able to crush Verge-level Daolords to death, to say nothing of someone like Ning.

“When I fought against Bertulu, he caused the area around us to transform into a world of grassy plains and tall mountains. I thought that was all just an illusion... but it was actually his heartworld projection.” Ning finally understood.

The manifestation of a heartworld projection was a symbol of all the power of an entire world being brought to bear! Even Ning felt constricted and restrained by its power. If it had been an ordinary master-class World God, that person probably would've been crushed straight to death! Even Ning was forced to use his Elementum Waterflame Gourd in order to hold on.

The difference in power was simply too great.

Both Fiendgods and Ki Refiners had to pursue increasingly greater heights in the Dao, but Heartforce Cultivators focused on greater stability in their heartworlds. Only with great stability would they be able to expand the size of their heartworld. As a result, Daos that were excessively oriented in a certain direction were actually unsuitable for inclusion in a heartworld! What heartworlds truly needed were highly stable and balanced Daos.

“To make the false real, to make the real false. The goal of Heartforce Cultivators is to make their heartworlds into true worlds, to make that which is illusory into something which is real.”

“Once they reach that level... with but a thought, a Heartforce Cultivator can produce a hundred Eternal weapons within his heartworld, and those Eternal weapons will all be real. He will be able to pull them out and use them in battle. With but a thought, he would be able to produce powerful pills, golems...” Ning was frightened just thinking about it.

Still, according to the heartforce legacy this only happened at the absolute apex of power. In addition, it didn't contain any instructions on how to actually reach this level.

"I haven't even reached the fifth stage of heartforce yet." Ning shook his head, putting away the white plume. He had to reach the sixth stage of heartforce before he would even have his own heartworld. Only then would he be able to use the guidance of this legacy, which would teach him how to quickly and stably expand his own heartworld.

"No wonder there are so few Heartforce Cultivators. To reach the sixth stage of heartforce is impossibly difficult." Ning shook his head. Even Houyi himself had most likely failed to reach the sixth stage of heartforce. The only person Ning knew of who had reached the sixth stage of heartforce was Bertulu.

One day later, Ning challenged Kilostar.

"Take it." Ning handed the white plume to Kilostar. "Bertulu asked me to transfer this to you."

"I knew it. I knew he had to have thrown the fight." Kilostar looked at Ning. "Oh, right. What weapons did he use?"

"Hammers," Ning said.

"You actually forced him to use his hammers? Oh! Did you see his true form?" Kilostar was quite curious. Although he was on decent terms with Bertulu, he had never been able to get Bertulu to show his true form.

"No." Ning shook his head. "Now that I've given you this legacy, my business here is done. Kilostar, if you ever want to meet me you can go to the Palace of the Sword."

"You are leaving? So soon?" Kilostar was quite surprised.

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"Alright. I'll be leaving soon as well. You will be in the Sword Palace while I will be in the Saber Palace." Kilostar nodded. "Let's see which of us will be the first to become a Samsara Daolord."

“Alright. Let’s see who makes it first!”

After Ning bid Kilostar farewell, he shattered the talisman which a Daolord of the Sword Palace had given him. The only members of the Twelve Palaces who had come to visit Ning had been from the Sword Palace or the Thunder Palace.

# Chapter 47: Departure

Ji Ning stood within his astral island by himself, staring at the emptiness around his island. The island which had represented Bertulu had already descended into the dark abyss, because Bertulu had already left.

Whoosh.

A streak of light suddenly flew towards him from afar.

Ning immediately turned to look. The person who had flown over was an azure-armored alien Daolord. This man was fairly ugly, and his skin was a coarse, dark-red color. Although he looked rather frightening, Ning knew that this man, Daolord Grayvast, was actually a very good man who was easy to get along with.

“Brother Darknorth.” The azure-armored, muscular-looking Daolord Grayvast landed on the island, then laughed. “You are planning to leave so soon?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “My sword-arts have reached a bottleneck. It’ll probably be quite some time before I can improve any further. In addition, I understand more than half of the more powerful experts are planning to leave as well.”

Bertulu had left, Kilostar was leaving, and many of the old timers were leaving as well.

“You might as well. The Sword Palace is a much better place than this place.” Daolord Grayvast laughed. “Even in the Endless Territories, our Palace of the Sword is considered a holy land for those who train in the Dao of the Sword.”

Ning nodded in agreement. Brightshore Kingdom was an organization on the same general level of power as the Dao Alliance and the Aeonian Kingdom. Almost all of its elite cultivators in the Dao of the Sword were gathered within the Palace of the Sword. One could imagine what an accumulation of wealth, talent, and legacies it had accumulated over the course of countless ages.

“Oh, right. Senior Grayvast, please have a seat first.” Ning hurriedly produced some Immortal wine, personally filling Daolord Grayvast’s cup. He asked curiously, “Bertulu’s astral island has already sank into that dark abyss. That means he should’ve left already. Senior, do you know which palace he chose?”

“You aren’t the only one curious about this. Many of the Daolords have been paying attention to him as well.” Daolord Grayvast sat down, then picked up a cup of wine and gave it a sip. “In the end, he chose the Palace of Radiance.”

“The Radiant Palace?” Ning was startled. “He plans to walk the Dao of Light?”

Heartforce Cultivators were incredibly powerful. Daolord Featherdress, who had left behind the heartforce legacy, was publicly acknowledged as the most powerful Daolord in the Endless Territories during his era! After gaining this legacy, Ning came to understand that once a heartworld reached truly massive proportions, a simple heartworld projection would be enough to crush an opponent to death. Even if it didn’t directly kill one’s opponent, it could still suppress and restrict them, causing them to be limited to a mere twenty percent of their true power.

And Heartforce Cultivators had more tricks up their sleeves than just that...

“Choosing the Dao of Light is the most stable, appropriate path.” Daolord Grayvast let out a sigh. “Everyone knows how powerful and inscrutable Heartforce Cultivators are, but training in heartforce is simply too difficult. There are incredibly few World-level Heartforce Cultivators. As for Daolords who are Heartforce Cultivators... very few of them exist in the Endless Territories. The Heartforce Palace is one of the Twelve Palaces, but it has a total of less than ten Daolords!”

Daolord Grayvast shook his head. “The Dao of Light is actually a fairly normal Dao in comparison. Bertulu can focus on the Dao of Light while spending some time in heartforce as well.”

“Now that I think about it...” Ning said softly, “When I fought against

him, he only used his heartworld projection to suppress me, then engaged me in close combat. He didn't really use a lot of heartforce techniques. It seems as though he decided long ago that he would use heartforce as a supporting skill. His main focus is on fighting in close combat."

"A very solid choice." Daolord Grayvast sighed. "This solid choice means that we can already imagine how dazzlingly powerful he will be in the future. In fact, if he successfully walks down the path he has started on, he will become either the Palace Lord or a vice Palace Lord."

.....

Ning chatted and drank with Daolord Grayvast, learning much more about the Twelve Palaces. Soon, the wine was all finished.

"Time to go." Ning rose to his feet.

"There is a teleportation array within the Astral Islands. It can send you straight to the Sword Palace." Daolord Grayvast rose to his feet as well.

"No need." Ning shook his head. "I have a good friend who came with me to the Brightshore Kingdom. She is currently somewhere in the Brightshore Kingdom. I plan to find her first, then I'll go to the Sword Palace."

"Oh?" Daolord Grayvast frowned slightly, then solemnly handed over a medallion. This medallion looked illusory and translucent, but one could vaguely make out the word 'sword' on the medallion. Daolord Grayvast handed the medallion over to Ning. "Technically speaking, you should only be given this medallion after you go to the Sword Palace and become one of our formal members. However, since you need to find your friend first, I'll let you bind this medallion right now. Once you bind it, you'll be one of our formal members."

Ning was startled. "You are going to give it to me in advance?"

"The Brightshore Kingdom is a dangerous place," Daolord Grayvast explained. "If I didn't give it to you... you might end up dying while traveling to the Sword Palace."

"Ah?!" Ning was shocked.



“The Brightshore Kingdom is an extremely large place with countless living beings within it. The almighty Hegemon actually went out of his way to personally create many dangers, hiding many legacies within those dangers,” Daolord Grayvast explained. “He wishes for the countless living beings within the Brightshore Kingdom to be filled with energy and courage. If everything is too peaceful and everyone lives in peace, the kingdom will produce far, far fewer major powers.”

Ning understood this principle. A peaceful life sapped one’s willpower. Even chaosworlds were filled with battle, to say nothing of the Endless Territories.

“Anyone who becomes a Daolord is required to join the Twelve Palaces,” Daolord Grayvast said. “Within the Twelve Palaces, all internal strife is forbidden. Even if you do hold a grudge against someone, we would encourage you to do your best to resolve things peacefully through mediation. If the mediation fails, you will still have to get advance permission before entering into a life-and-death duel. If you dare to kill one of your colleagues without getting that permission, you will be devoured by your lifeblood oath and killed on the spot.”

“Many of the Daolords will leave the Brightshore Kingdom to adventure through the outside lands.” Daolord Grayvast laughed. “If you want to kill people, do it outside. Don’t kill other Daolords of the Brightshore Kingdom.”

“Once you bind this medallion, none of the Daolords of the Brightshore Kingdom will dare to lay a finger on you,” Daolord Grayvast said. “That will make things much safer for you! To physically travel from this place to the Sword Palace means crossing more than half of the entire Brightshore Kingdom. There will be many Daolords on the way, including some special lifeforms who have bad tempers or strange dispositions. There are some who will slaughter anyone who crosses their path...”

Ning was speechless upon hearing all this.

“So... hurry up and bind it,” Daolord Grayvast urged.

Ning immediately sent his senses into the medallion. This medallion did

indeed hold a lifeblood oath within it that was quite similar to the one which Daolord Grayvast had just described. The Twelve Palaces forbade its members from engaging in internal combat. In addition, if the Brightshore Imperials or the Twelve Palaces fell into danger, the members of the palaces would have to do their utmost to rescue them. But of course, if one of the Imperials sought to kill you then you would be permitted to fight back; there would be no need to defend them.

“The Twelve Palaces must protect the imperial clan?” Ning raised his head to look at Daolord Grayvast.

Protecting the imperial clan was actually part of the charter of the lifeblood oath. But of course, in order to ensure that the experts of the Twelve Palaces were sincere in their loyalty, the Brightshore Imperials also had to swear oaths that they absolutely would not attack any members of the Twelve Palaces. If they did, they would no longer be protected and they could instead be counter-attacked and killed!

“Yes.” Daolord Grayvast nodded. “The Brightshore Kingdom was established by the almighty Hegemon. He created the Brightshore Kingdom for the sake of protecting his imperial clan. Although the Imperials are very powerful, they are extremely few in number.”

“Alright.” Ning understood.

Ning could also sense what an extraordinary aura this medallion had. Most likely, it was the almighty Hegemon himself who had created this medallion as well as the lifeblood oath. But of course, the Twelve Palaces had to agree with the wording of the oath. Only then would such a mighty organization have staying power.

“I suppose I can accept that.” Ning immediately swore the lifeblood oath. The medallion was instantly and easily bound as well.

“Eh?” As soon as he bound the medallion, Ning could sense ten ripples of power coming from the Astral Islands region. These were ripples emanating from other similar medallions.

“The Twelve Palaces and the Brightshore Imperials all have similar medallions. The ripples coming from those medallions will testify to their

identity, ensuring that we won't get into accidental fights against our fellows without realizing it," Daolord Grayvast said. "Now, no Daolord will dare to act against you here in the Brightshore Kingdom. As for World-level cultivators? I'm confident that you should be able to easily defeat any World-level cultivators. Oh – here is a star map of the Brightshore Kingdom."

Daolord Grayvast handed Ning a furled star map.

Ning accepted it. "Thank you, senior Grayvast. I'll be leaving now."

"I'll see you in the Sword Palace," Daolord Grayvast said. "Be careful on your journey."

"I will." Ning immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew away.

Daolord Grayvast watched as the sword-carrying white-robed youth flew away, then turned to leave as well.

The astral island which Ning had been on began to sink downwards into that dark abyss below. As for the random legacy treasures which Ning had left behind, they all scattered and began to fly towards the various other islands.

All the legacy treasures of the ninety-nine legacies would forever remain within the Astral Islands.

# Chapter 48: Yet Another Mirrorsnow Painting

The Brightshore Kingdom was an exceedingly large place.

Clouds fluttered about in the skies as a shuttle flew at high speed through the air. Ji Ning was seated in the lotus position aboard his ship, staring at the beautiful world of the Brightshore Kingdom.

“So the Astral Islands were over there. As for the Sword Palace, that’s over there. And oh, that’s where they greet newcomers? So that’s the place I was taken to when I was first abducted.” Ning now had a rough understanding of the geography of the Brightshore Kingdom. “I remember when I first arrived here and more than thirty thousand fellow World-level cultivators were led by those two silver-armored Daolords all the way to the Astral Islands. We flew for roughly forty-six days. On the eleventh day, I could sense the presence of another Mirrorsnow Painting.”

Teleportation was impossible within the borders of the Brightshore Kingdom. One would have to slowly fly from destination to destination.

“To go from the arrival area to the Astral Islands...” Ning engaged in a bit of calculation and was able to easily calculate the rough location of the Mirrorsnow Painting.

Those two silver-armored Daolords had flown in a straight line, and the painting was roughly a quarter of the distance between the arrival area and the Astral Islands.

“Eh? The Mirrorsnow Painting isn’t that far away from Youji’s position. I won’t have to make as much of a detour as I thought.” Ning was quite delighted.

Swoosh! His flying vessel transformed into a streak of light and sped off into the distance.

Ning had given Su Youji a message talisman. Due to the great distance which separated them, he was only able to get a rough sense of the direction where she was located. He flew for three full months, and on the

way he sensed the auras of quite a few Daolords. Those Daolords could sense that Ning belonged to the Twelve Palaces and so they naturally had no interest in causing trouble for Ning. Still, this journey gave Ning a good understanding of how dangerous the Brightshore Kingdom was.

Ning was ambushed multiple times on his trip. Clearly, the Brightshore Kingdom was a rather chaotic and brutal place. There was even more strife here than there was in the territory controlled by the Dao Alliance. Unfortunately for those poor bandits who attempted to waylay Ning, they quickly discovered that they had kicked a metal plate! The results of their attempts were foregone conclusions.

“Eh? A ripple!” The flying vessel quickly began to slow down and descend from its position within the clouds. The white-robed Ning was seated in the lotus position, a sword across his lap. Ning opened his eyes, a look of eagerness in his gaze.

“That ripple is coming from the Mirrorsnow Painting!” Ning could sense the resonance being generated by his own three Mirrorsnow Paintings. “I didn’t expect that after a thousand years, that painting would still remain in this location.”

.....

Deep underneath a lake that was located a ten billion kilometers away from Ning. There was a beautiful palace located here in the depths, filled with many maids and guards.

“Eh?” Within a side hall of this palace was an azure-scaled creature who was leaning against a throne while sipping some wine. The creature’s face suddenly tightened, causing the maid who had been giving him a neck massage to be badly startled.

“A Mirrorsnow Painting? Wait, three of them?” The azure-scaled creature was both shocked and delighted... but then, his face tightened once more.

A thousand years ago, when Ning had passed by this place after being abducted, this creature had already sensed the presence of those paintings. He was in possession of a copy, allowing him to sense the

presence of three other copies. He had been quite delighted, but as soon as he saw those two silver-armored Daolords who ignored him he had immediately realized that it was most likely an abducted World-level cultivator who was in possession of the paintings.

“Those are the same three copies I sensed last time. Did one of those World-level cultivators escape from the Astral Islands already?” The azure-scaled creature narrowed his eyes.

Swoosh! He transformed into a streak of light, almost instantly emerging from his aquatic palace. He soon emerged from the lake, lifting his head up out of the water to stare upwards.

Following the resonance, he turned his rather dark and icy gaze to stare towards that flying vessel that was ten billion kilometers away. He was able to see the vessel quite clearly, as well as the white-robed youth aboard the vessel.

“He’s not a Daolord. He’s just a World-level cultivator.” The azure-scaled creature was immediately delighted. He guessed that this person had most likely discovered him, and so he no longer hid his presence. He immediately sent out his godsense, sweeping it out to a distance of ten billion kilometers.

“He’s actually by himself? He’s the only one on his ship?” The azure-scaled creature grew increasingly excited. “It makes sense. He came out of the Astral Islands. Those people who leave the islands usually travel by themselves; it is quite rare for them to move around in groups. Even if he does have some subordinates in an estate-world treasure, they probably aren’t that strong given the fact that they are hiding.”

The azure-scaled creature let out a cold grin. “So you have three of the paintings but you want mine as well? How greedy. This fellow seems quite confident.” The azure-scaled creature slipped below the waves once more, quickly returning to his underwater palace.

The underwater palace.

As soon as the azure-scaled creature returned to his palace, he headed straight towards the main hall. He picked up an enormous thigh-bone and

then began to bang on a nearby drum with it. Boom! The drum emanated a series of ripples that instantly spread throughout the entire hall. One person after another began to emerge from locations throughout the palace, and all of them possessed auras of tremendous power that were at least as strong as the azure-scaled creature's aura.

“Azurekai.”

“Azurekai, why have you suddenly summoned us?”

“You even banged on the royal dragon drum. What is this all about?”

Soon, a total of twenty-six World-level experts appeared within the main hall. All of them could be considered cultivators, but they were all cultivators of various aquatic races. This was why they had placed their palace within the lake.

“Something wonderful has happened.” The azure-skinned creature let out a loud laugh. “Ten billion kilometers away, there is a World-level cultivator who is flying towards us at high speed.”

“Flying straight for us? A World-level cultivator?”

“Is he suicidal?”

The World-level experts present were all puzzled.

The azure-scaled creature said hurriedly, “He’s from the Astral Islands. There’s a bit of a grudge between the two of us.” He didn’t dare to admit that it was due to the Mirrorsnow Paintings, because those paintings were simply too valuable. Between the two of them, they held a total of four Mirrorsnow Paintings... this was a fortune that would cause even Daolords to grow desirous. If he admitted it, his ‘friends’ would probably start to bicker with him over the items.

“I once won a treasure off of him, but he had two sets of that treasure. These treasures resonate with each other, which is why he has followed me to this place,” the azure-scaled creature said. “He has an incredibly high number of treasures. After we kill him... I don’t want anything special, just those three paintings he holds. What do you say?”

“Three paintings?” The other World-level cultivators were instantly able to guess that the three paintings were fairly valuable.

“His other treasures won’t disappoint you either.” The azure-scaled creature frowned. “He came from the Astral Islands, but he was merely on par with me in strength. If the twenty-seven of us fight together, we can easily kill him.”

“If he came from the Astral Islands, he might’ve joined the Twelve Palaces.”

“Don’t worry.” The azure-scaled creature swept them with his gaze, then let out a cold laugh. “I came from the Astral Islands. I know it better than anyone else. Everyone who was directly admitted into the Twelve Palaces was an absolute monster. Very few were allowed entrance! The vast majority who escaped that place did so because they were lucky enough to piece together a full legacy. That fellow is probably on par with me at best! Even if we are unlucky enough to encounter someone freakishly strong... no matter how much of a freak he is, he can’t possibly fight the twenty-seven of us together. I’m telling you, this genius had many treasures on him.”

The others instantly grew excited and intrigued.

“We are the twenty-seven Waterfiend Lords of the Royal Dragon Palace. There’s no way we’d be afraid of him.”

“Kill him and take his treasures.”

“Kill him.”

The twenty-seven Waterfiend Lords of the Royal Dragon Palace were incredibly famous in this area. There were all members of aquatic races who had trained to the World-level, but only those who had reached certain levels of strength would be granted entry into this small squad. Within the Brightshore Kingdom, the powerful sects were generally guarded by Daolords, but most of them had rather strict rules. The Brightshore Kingdom was filled with many dangers and many fortunes; to locate good techniques or legacies wasn’t very hard here. Thus, many unaffiliated World-level cultivators ended up joining into minor groups to



work together.

World God Azurekai had relied on his own power to escape the Astral Islands. Although he didn't enter the Twelve Palaces, he just missed the cutoff by a tiny amount. He was the second most powerful individual in the palace, which was why others came when he called.

"That kid just emerged from the Astral Islands. He has no idea about our Royal Dragon Palace." The azure-skinned man said hurriedly, "Everyone, stay patient. Let's wait here inside our palace. Our palace has formations and restrictive spells protecting it; this will prevent him from realizing how many of us are here. After he reaches the outside of our palace, we'll charge out and surround him. We won't even give him a chance to run."

"Right."

"We are hiding in the shadows while he is standing in the light. So what if he made it out of the Astral Islands? We aren't pushovers either!"

Whoosh.

A distance of ten billion kilometers was fairly far. Ning had to fly for quite a few hours before arriving outside the lake. Ning's skill gave him courage, and his godsense had revealed the Royal Dragon Palace below him.

Swish! Ning put away his flying vessel, then charged straight into the lake and flew towards the palace. Soon, he reached the palace gates. He immediately saw the guards and maids within the palace.

"You actually dared to come to our Royal Dragon Palace?"

"So many paths lead to life, but you had to choose the one that leads to death."

Suddenly, streaks of light began to fly out from the Royal Dragon Palace. There were twenty-seven streaks of light in total, and they simultaneously released murderous auras as they joined together into a formation.

Ning just watched calmly. He murmured to himself, "Royal Dragon Palace, eh?"

# Chapter 49: Seven Waterfiend Lords

The twenty-seven streaks of light came to a halt after surrounding Ji Ning.

Ning glanced at them. The twenty-seven figures before him were all quite bizarre-looking. These were all creatures that were born as members of aquatic races. Although as World-level cultivators, they could now survive equally well on dry land or in the void of space, they still had an innate fondness for water. Ning similarly could live equally well in water or on land, but he still preferred to dwell on land.

“Eh?” Ning’s gaze fell upon the azure-scaled creature’s form. He could sense that the painting was being carried by that creature.

“Three paintings!” The azure-scaled creature felt a surge of excitement in his heart.

“Everyone...” Ning spoke out.

“Haha, are you afraid now? Too late!”

“Kill him.”

The twenty-seven Waterfiend Lords couldn’t be bothered to chat with Ning. They had dominated this region for quite some time and were figures of renown. They showed no mercy at all when attacking. They truly weren’t worried about this World-level cultivator at all; they had never encountered someone on their level who could withstand the twenty-seven of them.

The weakest of the twenty-seven was a master-class World God, while the strongest was a transcendent World God!

Boom! A black streak of lightning thundered down towards Ning.

Whoosh! A current of freezing energy surged out to try and freeze Ning.

Swish! An enormous web-shaped treasure swept out to capture Ning.

Hiss! A serpentine rope-like treasure twirled out to bind Ning.

The twenty-seven cultivators instantly launched simultaneously attacks

in a very practiced manner. Generally speaking, most World-level cultivators were only able to control two powerful treasures at the same time. A situation like this was a testament to the old saying, strength in numbers. A dazzling array of spells and treasures instantly swept out towards Ning in a wave, seeking to drown him. As for the World Gods amongst the twenty-seven, they charged straight towards Ning.

Whooooosh.

Rings of sword-light began to spread outwards.

Ning just stood there, surrounded by rings of sword-light. Although the freezing current of energy was able to freeze the waters of the lake as it reached out towards Ning, it instantly shattered whenever it touched the sword-light. As for the web treasures and the other treasures? They were completely stopped by Ning's sword-light.

"How average." Ning couldn't help but sigh to himself. When he had used his Unicorn's Domain had been able to withstand Bertulu, he had been under tremendous pressure. But now that he was fighting these twenty-seven Waterfiend Lords... he felt things were far too easy. He didn't even have to really focus on this fight; he instead simply activated his domain, allowing his sword-intent to automatically defend against the attacks.

"Kill!"

"Kill!"

Nineteen of the twenty-seven were World Gods. This was quite a powerful force, after all. World God Azurekai had been able to leave the Astral Islands without anyone helping him, and he had the power of a transcendent World God, but he was merely the second most powerful figure in their group. Only sufficiently powerful individuals would be admitted into their ranks, and these nineteen World Gods were filled with tremendous power, especially after being reinforced by their formation.

"Die." A streak of silver light shot out at tremendous speed towards Ning.

“Hm?” Ning held a single sword in his hands. He glanced sideways at the attack, then executed a simple sword-stance.

Clang! Crack!

Ning’s sword was even faster and his attack was even more profound!

It must be understood that the Unicorn’s Domain was based off the perfect fusion of the ‘Astral’ stance and the sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, the Unicorn’s Heart. The [Nameless] sword-art was a sword-art that had been left behind by an Eternal Emperor, while the Astral stance had been developed based on Violetjewel’s quintessence. Both were incredibly high-level sword-arts.

“What?!” The silver-streak of light was shocked after this clash. Ning’s sword-light had actually brushed him across the chest!

BOOM!

The silver streak of light retreated at tremendous speeds. The power of Ning’s strike was simply too enormous, and he was simply too strong. With a boom, the streak of light slammed into the distant walls of the Royal Dragon Palace, causing the entire palace to tremble. The other twenty-six Waterfiend Lords were all horrified, to say nothing of the palace attendants and maids.

The person Ning had just sent flying was the leader of the group... World God Dragonking.

World God Dragonking was a transcendent World God who was supported by a formation with multiple other World Gods! How could he have been beaten in just a single clash!

“Not good.”

“We are in trouble.”

“This opponent is too powerful.”

The other Waterfiend Lords all felt their hearts clench.

“Don’t fight him solo. Let’s all fight together.” Although World God Azurekai was rather shocked at how terrifyingly strong this opponent was,

the allure of those three paintings was simply too great. He immediately roared mentally, "Big brother Dragonking, let's join forces!"

"Alright!" World God Dragonking had a decent protective divine ability. Although he had been knocked flying, he hadn't suffered any significant injuries. "His sword-arts are quite profound. None of us are a match for him in solo combat. All of us need to fight together. There's no way he can take us all on at once. Find a chance to tie him up and bind him!"

"Right. Let's all join together."

World God Dragonking quickly flew back to rejoin them. They were all much more somber now. They either attacked with magic treasures from afar or cautiously advanced en masse towards Ning. By now, even the most arrogant member of their group, World God Dragonking, no longer dared to act brashly.

"The Brightshore Kingdom's territory really is rather lawless. Is this what the almighty Hegemon desires?" Ning shook his head. He had been waylaid and accosted multiple times on his trip to this place from the Astral Islands. This time, these twenty-seven had attacked him without even bothering to talk to him. From this, one could see how unruly this kingdom was.

By comparison... although there was also danger and combat within the territory of the Dao Alliance, it was a far more peaceful place! The Dao Alliance followed the principles of governance through inaction, but there was a reason for it. Ninety-nine percent of the territory of the Endless Territories was under the control of the Dao Alliance, and virtually all cultivators were a member of the alliance. There were simply too many cultivators! Even though they governed through inaction, they were still able to produce a few Daolords within each territory. How vast and powerful was the entire Dao Alliance?

The main weakness of the Dao Alliance was that its cultivators were too scattered out.

The Brightshore Kingdom's power was much more concentrated, even though it held much less territory. The almighty Hegemon was a

Brightshore Imperial, which meant he really didn't feel much pity or sympathy for 'alien' forms of life. He would use whatever means were effective in rearing a crop of powerful experts! The fatality rate in the Astral Islands was a testament to how cold and ruthless the almighty Hegemon could be.

According to the Twelve Palaces, the reason they existed and the reason the Hegemon had created the Brightshore Kingdom was so that Imperials would be protected. Because the Twelve Palaces had become extremely powerful, the almighty Hegemon respected them and placed them on an equal level.

Swish! Crack! Whoosh!

Many weapons and spells flew towards Ning in a steady stream.

Moments ago, Ning had been able to rely on his supreme sword-arts to easily defeat his opponent. However, simply relying on sword-arts was no longer enough. He would now have to actually fight.

Boom!

The nineteen World Gods were all sent flying backwards.

"What?!"

"He's too strong."

"Quick, flee!"

Slash! Sword-light flashed as the tip of Ning's sword pierced into the body of World God Dragonking, the fastest of the twenty-seven. This time, Ning infused his strike with the power of his azureflower mist energy. Although the strike had to first pass through a layer of armor, and although World God Dragonking's body was comparable to a Chaos treasure... his body began to tremble, then crack apart as blood began to flow from every single part of his body.

"Die." Ning showed no mercy at all as he delivered three consecutive furious strikes upon the body of World God Dragonking.

"No!" World God Dragonking was utterly horrified. "How can he be this

strong? He's clearly just at the World level. How can he be this much stronger than me?!" The three consecutive blows smashed World God Dragonking's body into dust, causing even his true soul to dissipate.

"How can a World-level cultivator be this strong?"

"He's too strong!"

The Waterfiend Lords began to flee in utter terror. Even when they joined forces, they were still defeated in the very first clash? But of course, if they knew that Kilostar's thousand clones weren't able to do anything against Ji Ning, they would no longer be surprised by their defeat.

"He's a freak! He's one of those horrifyingly, freakishly talented geniuses that were in the higher strata of the Astral Islands. He must've been admitted into the Twelve Palaces already!" The fleeing World God Azurekai was more frightened than anyone else. "And he must've been one of the top freaks!"

Some of those 'freaks' were strong because of special treasures or secret arts, while others held enormous advantages in terms of speed and strength. Those freakishly strong cultivators who were as strong and fast as Daolords of the First Step were the most terrifying ones of all. Kilostar and Ning both belonged to this category. Even when Ning's sword-arts had been weak, his powerful divine body had allowed him to stably reside within the fifth stratum. Once his sword-arts improved, he became strong enough that even Bertulu would have to reveal his true form in order to be certain of victory over Ning.

"Fleeing?" After slaying World God Dragonking, Ning's body flickered as he began to chase after World God Azurekai.

World God Azurekai and World God Dragonking were both transcendent World Gods and the strongest members of the twenty-seven. As for the others? Ning really didn't care about them.

Boom! Sword-light descended.

"No!" World God Azurekai struggled to defend, utterly terrified. But after a few strokes of sword-light, he was finished.

World God Northrest had acquired something like the [Golden Idol] out of pure luck. In contrast, World God Azurekai had only been able to train his body to make it comparable to a top-grade Protocosmic spirit-treasure. He hadn't even reached the Chaos treasure level. Protective divine abilities were very rare, after all, and they were extremely hard to train in. Elite protective divine abilities were even more rare!

Soon, World God Azurekai disappeared into a cloud of dust.

Ning glanced at the treasures he had left behind, then waved his hand and collected it all.

As for the other Waterfiend Lords, they had all fled long ago. They didn't even want their palace any longer. As for the attendants and maids inside the palace, they had hidden themselves in terror.

"Time to go." Ning soared into the skies, shooting out of the lake and into his flying vessel as he departed. Once he entered his vessel, Ning began to bind the treasures which World God Azurekai had left behind. Soon, he located the Mirrorsnow Painting he was looking for.



# Chapter 50: Bloodfire Cloudfruit

The flying shuttle flew through the clouds with Ji Ning seated on the deck, going through the treasures he had just acquired.

“It is actually...” Ning stared at the Mirrorsnow Painting in his hands. This painting was a painting of a beautiful palace. This palace was slightly different from the painting of a palace which Ning had already acquired, but Ning immediately recognized it as being painted by Emperor Mirrorsnow... partially because of how ugly it was, but also because no one could imitate his distinct sword-intent.

“A painting of a palace? Is this another copy of the first painting?” Ning nodded slowly. “It makes sense. I would have to have stupid good luck in order to find the fourth painting right away.”

Ning wasn't too surprised by the fact that this painting wasn't the fourth painting.

“Still... at least this painting can be sold for roughly a hundred or two hundred thousand cubes of chaos nectar. In fact, someone who desperately needs it would probably be willing to pay even more.” Ning was in quite a good mood. These paintings were popular, valuable items. Generally speaking, those who acquired the paintings wouldn't divulge it to others! Given that there were only forty of them in all the Endless Territories, and given that some might have multiple copies of each...

It certainly wasn't going to be easy for him to just randomly encounter the exact piece he needed. For him to even find a copy of the first one here in the Brightshore Kingdom was already a stroke of great luck.

“After I go to the Palace of the Sword, I'll ask the Twelve Palaces to help me locate the fourth painting,” Ning mused to himself.

The Twelve Palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom were on the same general level of power as the Dao Alliance.

Last time, Ning had asked Daolord Badlands to help him buy Mirrorsnow Paintings, and Daolord Badlands had sought out the Dao

Alliance to carry out this task. Because they were on a tight time schedule, the Dao Alliance didn't really carry a large-scale search. The Twelve Palaces, however, was itself an incredibly powerful organization that held cultivators, Aeonians, and other special lifeforms.

In the future, Ji Ning would be one of their links to the Dao Alliance.

In the future, Gorho would be one of their links to the Aeonians.

As a result, the Twelve Palaces of Brightshore were on very good terms with many of the organizations of the Endless Territories. It might be hard for the Twelve Palaces to immediately procure a copy of the fourth Mirrorsnow Painting, but if they were given enough time they stood an extremely good chance of succeeding. But of course... that was only if you were willing to pay the price!

Ning sent out a strand of his divine power into his new copy of the first painting, creating a divine clone within it.

Within the palace inside the painting. A golden-robed emperor manifested atop the royal throne within the palace.

Ning sighed upon seeing this. "Although there are slight differences, I can sense that he is similar to the golden-robed emperor within my original first painting."

"Oh. A while ago, it was World God Azurekai who met with me. Did you kill Azurekai?" The golden-robed emperor looked downwards at Ning.

"Yes." Ning nodded. "I already acquired other Mirrorsnow Paintings in the past. Do all ten copies of the first Mirrorsnow Painting created by Emperor Mirrorsnow hold the exact same 'type' of person?"

"They do." The golden-robed emperor smiled and nodded. He didn't really care about Azurekai's death. He existed for the sake of completing the Eternal Emperor's mission, and for someone to be able to kill Azurekai meant that this person should be even stronger.

"Let's have a little competition," Ning said.

"Azurekai was never able to defeat me." The golden-robed emperor

produced a golden greatsword in his hands as he walked down the stairs towards Ning. “You said you already have other Mirrorsnow Paintings. You should know the rules.”

“I know them.” Ning nodded.

After a brief battle, Ning defeated the golden-robed emperor.

Aboard the flying vessel, the true Ning revealed a look of resignation. “Although there are slight differences in the sword-arts they use, the two golden-robed emperors really do belong to the exact same ‘school’. This is of no use to my sword-arts whatsoever.”

“What else is there?” Ning began to go through the rest of his spoils of war.

World God Azurekai didn’t have any particularly good treasures aside from the painting. He did have an azure sword which was an Eternal weapon, but Ning was quickly able to judge that it was merely a low-grade Eternal weapon that was actually weaker than his Violetjewels! And there was only one Eternal weapon. As for the other treasures, they were negligible.

“He did have two decent techniques.” Ning glanced through them. “Useless to me, but I can transmit them to the Three Realms.”

“I wonder what World God Dragonking had?” Ning scanned through these treasures as well. World God Dragonking was a spear-wielder, but his spear was also merely a low-grade Eternal treasure.

The Brightshore Kingdom was a place filled with many dangers but also many treasures and legacies. So long as you were willing to brave the dangers, you would have a good chance of acquiring powerful treasures and legacies. Some of the more powerful World-level cultivators were thus able to acquire Eternal weapons, but most of those weapons were merely low-grade.

“The almighty Hegemony is such a cheapskate. I bet most of the Eternal weapons he scattered throughout the Brightshore Kingdom are just low-grade,” Ning muttered to himself. “The Dao Alliance is better. In the rest

of the Endless Territories, Eternal weapons are quite rare and hard to obtain, but the ones that you do find are usually pretty good. In fact, some ruins might even hold top-grade Eternal weapons.”

The ruins and relic sites of the Endless Territories were generally left behind by Daolords. It was only natural that they would hold excellent treasures. The equivalent places in the Brightshore Kingdom, however, were intentionally created by the almighty Hegemon! As a result, almost all of the treasures were ‘mere’ low-grade Eternal weapons at best.

“Eh?” A jade bottle suddenly appeared in Ning’s hands, causing him to reveal a look of surprise.

“A pureloop jade bottle? And it holds a Bloodfire Cloudfruit inside?” Ning willed the stopper of the bottle to pop out, allowing a fruit to emerge from within the bottle. This was a fruit that was completely crimson in color, and mist could be seen swirling in the air around it. Ning had noticed this bottle earlier in his estate-world when he had quickly scanned through World God Dragonking’s treasures, but only now did he realize what a treasure it was and what it held inside.

“Pureloop jade bottles can contain vast worlds within them. The vast world inside this one can form a mighty Pureloop Jade Formation that will draw upon all the chaos energy of that entire vast world, distilling it into chaos nectar.” Ning sighed in amazement. This pureloop jade bottle was far better at distilling chaos nectar than the prisonworlds created by World God Pangaea.

This pureloop jade bottle was able to distill a full cube of chaos nectar every chaos cycle. Still... even Daolords had finite lifespans. With each step they took, they walked the boundaries between life and death. Some would perish after living for a mere thousand chaos cycles. Thus, these bottles generally weren’t sold for too high a price. Most were collected by sects and would be sold for roughly ten thousand cubes of chaos nectar.

Aside from being used to distill chaos nectar, the bottle could also be used to hold some of the marvelous items that were birthed from the primordial chaos. There were certain treasures such as fruits or spirit-

leaves that would quickly lose their efficacy if not stored in a proper manner. If you placed them within the heart of a Pureloop Jade Formation, the formation would be able to prevent any leakage at all. This formation was able to hold any type of energy, making it quite suitable for storing treasures.

“It actually held a Bloodfire Cloudfruit within it.” Ning mumbled to himself, “Did this guy even know how valuable this thing is?”

Ning had gained much information from Daolord Solesky, which was why he knew about more than 90% of the known treasures which existed in the Endless Territories. World God Dragonking hadn’t been given a similar legacy, and it really was possible that he didn’t know what a Bloodfire Cloudfruit was.

“Bloodfire Cloudfruit is incredibly valuable. These fruits are naturally born from the primordial chaos and are extremely few in number. A single cloudfruit can completely transform the divine body of a cultivator, converting it into a divine body that is completely formed from the element of fire. With this new body, the cultivator will find that training in the Dao of Fire will be much easier than it was before. He will also be able to merge and release Bloodfire, then use it to fly.” Ning was truly quite amazed.

Ning, for example, was able to control his [Novessence Thunder] and even had possession of Dao lightning, but there was no way for him to fully merge into those types of lightning. This was because there was simply no way for his body to connect with them.

The Golden Crows were able to ride Golden Solarfire because their divine bodies were able to perfectly join together with that fire.

Exalted Celestial Thundergod was unable to fly using Ninehorn Lightning Serpents because his divine body was unable to perfectly join together with them.

Ning had lost quite a few clones in order to transform his divine body, making it thunder-aligned and capable of using the lightning serpents to fly. However, Ninehorn Lightning Serpents were ranked as a type of Elder

lightning. They weren't even at the Chaos level! There was naturally no way for Ning's body to take control over Chaos lightning and use it to fly. If there was, Ning would be moving at a truly astonishing speed.

However, Bloodfire Cloudfruits were suitable for controlling Bloodfire, a type of Chaos fire. If you used it to flee, the vast majority of Daolords would be unable to catch up to you.

This single fruit was worthy roughly a million cubes of chaos nectar... and it generally could not be found in the open market. These types of treasures that were born from the primordial chaos were incredibly rare, unlike Eternal weapons which could be forged.

"Or perhaps this World God Dragonking did know, but was afraid to reveal it?" Ning mused. "Did he know? Or didn't he? Still, it doesn't matter. This fruit is useless to me. If I encounter any treasures that I need, I can sell it off or trade it." Ning was in no rush to sell it. This was a fine treasure for a Daolord who walked the Dao of Fire. If he waited for an opportune time, he would be able to sell it for a very high price.

"I really didn't expect to be waylaid so many times after leaving the Astral Islands. I killed quite a few of those bandits, but unexpected my most valuable loot was this Bloodfire Cloudfruit rather than the Mirrorsnow Painting." Ning hurriedly stored the fruit back into the pureloop jade bottle.

"Time to go." Ning had quite a few valuable treasures on him already, and so he was quickly able to return to his usual calm.

After leaving the Royal Dragon Palace, Ning flew for more than two more months before finally reaching the place where Su Youji had secreted herself.

# Chapter 51: Bluegrace Sect

The Bluegrace Sect was one of the many sects within the enormous territory ruled over by the Brightshore Kingdom. It had been established by Daolord Bluegrace and was an ancient organization with deep roots.

The Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect. The residential area for high-level sect members.

There was an estate located at the peak of one of these mountains, and outside this estate sat eighteen World-level cultivators in the lotus position.

“Hmph.” A white-robed woman at the entrance to the estate glanced at those eighteen, then let out a cold snort.

“Junior apprentice-sister Qingfan, you should urge the Flamefairy Su Youji to stop resisting.” A black-robed elder, one of the eighteen seated World-level cultivators, spoke out. “Have her obediently hand over her golems, her bugbeast, and that statue of Feixian the Exalted. If she does that, we naturally won’t cause any further trouble for her. Otherwise... once the order comes from the headquarters, she shall perish and her Dao shall vanish!”

“Little sister Youji rescued some of our fellow disciples. Not only have you shown no gratitude, you’ve plotted against her and tried to take her treasures away from her. Little sister Youji risked her life in order to acquire that statue of Feixian the Exalted.” The white-robed woman said angrily, “An order from the headquarters? You might be able to cause trouble here in this local branch, but the main base isn’t a place where you fools can do as you please!”

The eighteen World-level cultivators no longer spoke. They just continued their silent vigil.

“Hmph.” The white-robed woman angrily returned to the estate.

Within the estate.

Su Youji was seated in the lotus position within one of the rooms in the

estate, engaging in silent meditation. Dressed in fiery robes, Su Youji emanated an aura of incredible allure and magnetism . It was as though she was the most beautiful, most seductive woman who had ever been born, so beautiful that even World-level cultivators would be affected by her presence. Suddenly, she opened her eyes. When she did so, she withdrew her aura of magnetism. She glanced outside, then smiled. “Elder sister Qingfan.”

“Little sister Youji.” The white-robed woman walked into the room.

“I’m sorry to have caused you trouble, elder sister Qingfan,” Su Youji said. “I put you in a precarious situation here in your sect.”

“Don’t worry. This is my estate. World-level cultivators are barred from barging into the residences of their fellow disciples. They’ll only be able to enter if they receive a command from the sectlord to do so,” the white-robed woman said. “So long as you are in my estate, they will be completely unable to get their hands on you. As for the sectlord, he’s a figure of incredible power. If they think they can convince him to issue an order... hmph. Hmph!”

Su Youji couldn’t help but sigh silently to herself.

This entire affair...

After she left the Astral Islands, she had quickly realized how chaotic and unruly the Brightshore Kingdom was. She had acted with great caution, first purchasing a star map and getting an understanding of the Brightshore Kingdom’s rough geography. Her goal was to go to the Palace of Fire and test her luck, but midway on her journey she accidentally entered a strange, dangerous location.

There were many such locations within the Brightshore Kingdom. Some had been personally crafted by the almighty Hegemon, but some were left behind by deceased Daolords. There were many dangerous locations which were undiscovered and unknown to most cultivators.

Su Youji ended up entering a dangerous region which had been set up by Feixian the Exalted. She encountered many dangers in that place, and eventually she found herself in a dangerous situation but was rescued by



Fairy Qingfan's group. To be specific, it was Fairy Qingfan herself who had rescued her. Su Youji felt very grateful towards her, and so she had joined Fairy Qingfan's group of three.

They had braved the dangers of that place together, and Su Youji had put her golems and bugbeasts into full effect. In the end... she actually passed the trial which Feixian the Exalted had laid down, becoming her personal disciple.

Feixian the Exalted had left behind many treasures, all of which now belonged to Su Youji. The rest of his treasures had been located within an estate-world which Su Youji had easily taken away without notice, but his statue had been located at the very highest position within the palace. Su Youji had to personally climb up to grab it, and this was witnessed by Fairy Qingfan and the others.

Fairy Qingfan's group had experienced many life-and-death battles alongside Su Youji. They all trusted each other very much, and Fairy Qingfan had even saved Su Youji's life. Thus, Su Youji didn't harbor any suspicions regarding them.

Back then, Fairy Qingfan had said to her, "Little sister Youji, you are heading to the Twelve Palaces? That's in the same direction as we are headed. We are going back to our Eastsmoke branch. Let's travel together!"

Su Youji and Fairy Qingfan had quickly become fast friends and had grown close to each other, and so they continued to travel together after exiting the trials.. Fairy Qingfan had grown up here in the Brightshore Kingdom and so was quite familiar with the local region. They arrived at the Eastsmoke branch without any trouble... but right after they had sat down and drank two cups of wine within Fairy Qingfan's residence, these World-level cultivators had immediately shown up and surrounded them.

As it turned out, one of the other companions on their journey, World God Whiteswan, had reported on the outcome of their adventures to the branch leader of the Eastsmoke branch. The Eastsmoke branch leader was merely a World-level cultivator, and he grew greedy for Su Youji's

bugbeasts and golems. Since Su Youji wasn't a member of this sect, he immediately issued an order to kill her and take her treasures.

"Don't worry, little sister. He's just a branch leader. As far as status goes, he isn't significantly superior to me. He just has a few connections in the main base, which was why he was given the position of branch leader. Without the sectlord's orders, there's not a damn thing he can do. You can stay here for as long as you wish, little sister."

Su Youji nodded.

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A flying vessel had just appeared in the clouds high above the Bluegrace Sect. A white-robed youth was seated in the lotus position on the decks of the vessel, a sword across his lap. The youth glanced downwards.

"My message-talisman is directly below. Based on the star map which Daolord Grayvast gave me, this place should be one of the nine branches of the Bluegrace Sect." Ning was rather puzzled. "Why did Youji come to the Bluegrace Sect?"

The Bluegrace Sect had been established by Daolord Bluegrace. The entire sect had a total of four Daolords! Daolord Bluegrace was an extremely powerful figure, but the other three Daolords were a bit weaker; they were merely black-armored Daolords.

The Daolords of the Twelve Palaces were divided up into several different levels of power. There were black-armored, azure-armored, silver-armored, and gold-armored Daolords. The black-armored Daolords were the lowest level Daolords.

"No ripples?" Ning stared downwards at the Eastsmoke branch. "There are no Daolords protecting this place."

It made sense. There were only four Daolords, while the Bluegrace Sect had a total of nine branches. According to what Ning's star map claimed, the four Daolords usually resided in the main base.

"Youji is in the Eastsmoke branch..." Although Ning was puzzled, he still put away his flying vessel then began to fly downwards in person.

“Quite impressive.” Ning stared downwards at the Eastsmoke branch. The Eastsmoke branch covered an extremely vast territory of over ten million kilometers. “According to this star map, this branch holds a total of more than three hundred World-level cultivators. The Brightshore Kingdom really is quite unlike the Dao Alliance. The sects of the Dao Alliance are all extremely cautious when they recruit new World-level cultivators, keeping their numbers low. Here, it seems their motto is ‘the more the merrier’.”

The Dao Alliance governed through inaction. The Badlands Court was a good example. Daolord Badlands was the leader of the Court and the entire territory, but he only had roughly a hundred World-level cultivators under his command. The vast Badlands Territory had more than ten thousand World-level cultivators, but they were all scattered across many smaller organizations.

The Brightshore Kingdom was different. The Daolords of the Brightshore Kingdom and the organizations they established, such as the Bluegrace Sect, centralized things far more. The main base and nine branches of the Bluegrace Sect alone held more than five thousand World-level cultivators! They really did believe in the concept of strength in numbers. This was because the Daolords of the Brightshore Kingdom were all prevented from fighting amongst each other, due to all of them being members of the Twelve Palaces.

Since Daolords were unable to directly do battle, battles amongst sects in the Brightshore Kingdom had to be carried out by World-level cultivators. Thus, the more the merrier! The battles amongst World-level cultivators were quite brutal and savage.

“Halt, fellow Daoist! This place is the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect.” A tall, skinny World-level cultivator flew out and shouted at Ning.

“I am Darknorth.” Ning smiled. “I’ve come to join the Bluegrace Sect.”

“Fellow Daoist, you wish to join our Bluegrace Sect?” The tall, skinny cultivator gave Ning a weighing glance. World-level cultivators were generally mid-level figures within the Brightshore Kingdom. If Ning was

an Elder God, he wouldn't be treated in such a friendly manner. "Haha, the doors of our Bluegrace Sect are always open and welcome. Fellow Daoist, please follow me."

Ning smiled as he followed the man inside, moving past the protective formations and entering the sect itself.

This was one of the branches of the Bluegrace Sect. The formations protecting it had naturally been laid down by Daolord Bluegrace himself. Although the formations weren't that strong when being controlled by a group of World-level cultivators, Ning wasn't certain that he would be able to overcome it.

"Please follow me, fellow Daoist." The tall, skinny World-level cultivator flew alongside Ning. The branch was more than ten million kilometers in size, quite large.

"What's going on over there?" Ning pointed off into the distance, towards the direction where he could sense Su Youji was located.

"The sect has disciples of varying levels of strength. The stronger World-level cultivators reside in that area." The tall, skinny World-level cultivator pointed while speaking.

"Oh." Ning now understood. Suddenly, he stretched out his palm, making it expand in size to become dozens of meters long. He immediately grabbed onto that World God as easily as he would grab onto a mouse. This person was responsible for welcoming and greeting guests, but he merely had the power of an elite World God. In the face of Ning's power, he wasn't even able to struggle.

"Fellow Daoist!" The man was utterly terrified.

"If I wanted your life, I could take it in an instant. If you want to stay alive, don't fight me," Ning sent mentally. Then, with a whoosh, he transferred the man into his own estate-world.

Ning transformed into a streak of light, flying towards Su Youji's residence at high speed.

# Chapter 52: A New Disciple

Ji Ning flew through the air towards the region where he sensed Su Youji was residing. She was within an estate at the very peak of a mountain, and there were eighteen figures seated in the lotus position in front of it.

“Why are eighteen World-level cultivators keeping watch over this estate?” Ning muttered softly to himself.

Within Ning’s estate-world.

The cultivator Ning had captured stared at the white-robed Ning in terror. “Senior, please spare me!”

“Smart kid. Answer all of my questions accurately. There exists no grudge between the two of us. Unless absolutely necessary, I won’t kill you,” Ning said calmly. He had created this clone using half of his divine power, and his clone would be easily capable of slaying this cultivator.

“Understood.” The tall, skinny World-level cultivator nodded repeatedly.

This was no joke. He had been captured so quickly that he didn’t even have a chance to fight back. He knew exactly how great the disparity between their power levels was. In fact, he even suspected that this white-robed youth might actually be a Daolord in disguise. Now that he was trapped in this estate-world, how could he dare to be disobedient? Wisdom lay in knowing when to resist and when to comply.

“I ask you this.” Ning pointed at the air next to him with a finger, causing a map of the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect to appear. This map included the estate at the top of the mountain, as well as the eighteen World-level cultivators seated in the lotus position before it.

“Who resides within this estate?” Ning pointed at the estate at the top of the mountain.

“That’s the estate of senior apprentice-sister Qingfan,” the captured cultivator said hurriedly. “Senior apprentice-sister Qingfan is extremely strong, and she has the power of a supreme World God. She ranks as one of the top ten cultivators here in the Eastsmoke branch.”

Ning nodded, then pointed and asked, "Why are there eighteen World-level cultivators in front of her estate?"

"Senior, are you friends with senior apprentice-sister Qingfan?" The captured cultivator suddenly asked in a soft voice.

"Answer me." Ning frowned.

"Senior, senior apprentice-sister Qingfan is in a lot of trouble right now. That's why her estate is under watch." The captured cultivator said hurriedly, "When she was out adventuring with two other fellow disciples, she became friends with an outsider known as the Flamefairy. The two of them are very close to each other."

A sharp light flickered through Ning's eyes. Flamefairy?

"I heard that they met each other and helped rescue each other in a dangerous ruins which had been left behind by Feixian the Exalted. They experienced many dangers together, and in the end this Flamefairy acquired the statue of Feixian the Exalted," the captured cultivator said. "Afterwards, the Flamefairy accompanied senior apprentice-sister Qingfan to our Eastsmoke branch..."

The captured cultivator let out an awkward laugh. "And here, a few rather embarrassing things happened."

"Speak!" Ning barked.

"Y-y-es! I'll tell you everything!" The captured cultivator said hurriedly, "One of the two fellow disciples who went out alongside senior apprentice-sister Qingfan, a World God known as Whiteswan, immediately made a report to the branch leader once he returned to the branch. My understanding is that our branch leader was interested in this Flamefairy's treasures and was planning to kill her and take them all."

Ning's eyes narrowed.

"Killing and looting is very common here, and it is said that this Flamefairy has a set of very powerful bugbeasts and golems, as well as that statue of Feixian the Exalted. She might have other valuable treasures as well." The captured cultivator let out a sigh. "But who would've thought

that senior apprentice-sister Qingfan would notice that something was off? She helped the Flamefairy fight back, then actually helped the Flamefairy hide within her own estate. Now, the Flamefairy just hides in there and refuses to leave no matter what.”

The captured cultivator explained, “Our Bluegrace Sect forbids its disciples from barging into the personal estates of our World-level cultivators. No one would dare to violate this rule, unless they were doing so on the orders of the sectlord himself. This is one of our laws. Thus, there’s nothing our branch leader can do. All he can do is have his loyal subordinates keep a close watch as he tries to come up with some other ideas.

“Our branch leader wishes to kill the Flamefairy, whereas senior apprentice-sister Qingfan wishes to protect her. As a result, senior apprentice-sister Qingfan’s been living a rather unpleasant life recently. I hear that she hasn’t left her estate at all.” The man secretly glanced at Ning’s expressions. He was guessing that there had to be some sort of a special connection between Ning and Qingfan.

“Let me ask you something else. What type of protective formations does the Eastsmoke branch have?” Ning asked.

The cultivator immediately and obediently revealed everything he knew.

.....

Ning began to fly towards that distant estate, his mind filled with thoughts. He had been able to easily enter this branch, but taking Su Youji out of it would be no easy task. This was the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect, after all. If all the protective formations here were activated, things would become quite problematic.

Swoosh. Ning began to descend at high speed.

“Eh?” The eighteen World-level cultivators seated before the estate all raised their heads to look at Ning.

“Who are you?” One of the black-robed elders said coldly, “I don’t believe I’ve seen you before.”

“I am Darknorth. Greetings, fellow Daoists.” Ning smiled. “I just recently joined the Bluegrace Sect, and so I haven’t met with the vast majority of our fellow disciples yet.”

“Oh, a new arrival?”

“So a new junior apprentice-brother has joined our ranks.”

These eighteen were merely responsible for keeping a watch over this place. Aside from the black-robed elder who was in charge of them, these cultivators didn’t really have a great deal of status within the Eastsmoke branch. Thus, they were all quite courteous when they met fellow disciples.

In most schools, people knew each other by their unique auras. Once you met someone, you would be able to easily recognize that person in the future.

Schools like the Twelve Palaces had far too many members who were scattered throughout the Endless Territories, which was why the almighty Hegemon had personally crafted those identity medallions. It wasn’t easy to create these medallions, all of which resonated with each other. The Mirrorsnow Paintings had similar resonances as well. Even though these weren’t particularly high-quality items, the cost of creating each medallion wasn’t exactly cheap. The forging process was quite complicated! The Bluegrace Sect had more than five thousand World-level cultivators. It naturally wouldn’t outfit all of its people with such treasures!

The eighteen didn’t suspect a thing. This was a central region in the Eastsmoke branch, with hundreds of World-level cultivators present and a protective formation which had been personally established by Daolord Bluegrace himself. The formations here were all extremely complicated and profound. Which World-level cultivator would dare to barge into this place? Only a suicidal one!

“Junior apprentice-brother, why have you come here?” The black-robed elder said coldly.

“To meet with senior apprentice-sister Qingfan.” Ning smiled.



“Oh?” The faces of all eighteen tightened slightly.

“What sort of a relationship is between you and her?” The black-robed elder asked.

“Senior apprentice-sister Qingfan was my benefactor. To her, it was nothing more than a bit of casual guidance, but I’ve never forgotten it. Because of her, I decided to join the Bluegrace Sect after I became a World God, all for the sake of repaying her kindness,” Ning said.

The black-robed elder frowned as he looked at Ning, then instructed coldly, “Go ahead.”

In recent years, quite a few people had come to visit Qingfan. However, no one had been able to rescue the Flamefairy Su Youji from this gilded cage.

“Senior apprentice-sister Qingfan!” Ning walked to the entrance of the estate, then called out, “Senior apprentice-sister Qingfan! Senior apprentice-sister Qingfan!”

He called out multiple times.

Instantly, Ning could make out the vague form of a white-robed woman appear off in the distance. The woman gracefully walked out of the estate, then looked at Ning.

Ning immediately sent her a mental message. “If you want to save Youji, cooperate with me.”

Fairy Qingfan couldn’t help but feel startled by this. The Eastsmoke branch wasn’t a large place, and the story of the Flamefairy had quickly been made public. However, there were very, very few people who knew that the Flamefairy’s name was Su Youji. In addition, this sword-bearing white-robed youth was someone who she had never met before.

“Senior apprentice-sister Qingfan, long ago you provided me with tutelage. I finally have broken through to the World level and have joined the Bluegrace Sect as well.” A look of gratefulness was on Ning’s face. “Thank you for your guidance all those years ago, senior apprentice-sister.”

“I just gave you a few casual pointers.” A hint of a smile was on Fairy Qingfan’s face. “I didn’t expect that the Elder God I guided would have become a World God by now.”

The eighteen World-level cultivators could hear their oral conversation. But of course, there was no way they could eavesdrop on the mental one.

“Who are you?” Fairy Qingfan sent mentally. “Hmph. You wish to help out Youji? Hmph. These fools tried to use this method to cheat me before. Don’t even dream about getting into my estate.”

“Just help me tell Youji one thing, and she’ll know who I am,” Ning sent back.

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Su Youji was seated in the lotus position within her room. Everything was perfectly still.

“Little sister Youji.” Divine power flowed through the area, manifesting as a clone of Fairy Qingfan. Her true form was still conversing with Ning at the entrance, which was why she had manifested a clone here to speak with Su Youji.

“What is it, big sister Qingfan?” Su Youji opened her eyes and looked puzzledly at Fairy Qingfan.

Fairy Qingfan asked her, “Someone wishes to meet with you. Any idea who this person is?”

“Me? I don’t think I know many people at all, here at the Eastsmoke branch.” Su Youji was confused.

Fairy Qingfan looked at her. “He said... his name is Ji Ning.”

# Chapter 53: Leave It To Me

Su Youji's body trembled.

His name was Ji Ning?

"He came for me?" Su Youji's mind was filled with many complex thoughts and feelings. She felt a hint of excitement, but she also felt a hint of remorse! She knew that this place was where the Eastmoke branch was headquartered, and that it naturally was protected by many restrictive spells. This was an extremely tightly guarded place. Although Ji Ning was quite formidable, fighting in an enemy's nest was still an extremely problematic affair.

She had thought that Ji Ning would spend a million years in the Astral Islands. She had planned in quietly training in the legacy left behind by Daolord Feixian the Exalted, as Feixian's skills primarily lay in the realms of charm, illusion, and control! She was a Daolord who was so terrifyingly powerful that she was given the title of 'the Exalted'. Generally speaking, Daolords who were slightly weaker than her would instantly fall under her control after a single glance!

She was an individual who was incredibly powerful!

Su Youji was born with tremendous affinity for skills involving charm and allure. Even when she had no legacies to guide her, she had been able to create a charming technique of tremendous power. This was why she had been able to pass all of the deadly trials left behind by Feixian the Exalted, and in the end she was found to be qualified to become Feixian's personal disciple!

"My original plan had been to train here for ten thousand years and reach the third stage of the 'Flying Immortal' secret-art, then take control of the eighteen World-level cultivators outside and leave stealthily." Even right now, Su Youji was capable of taking control over two or three World-level cultivators at the same time. However, this sort of mind control spell could only be maintained for a brief period of time.

Su Youji had never attempted to leave by force. This was a branch

headquarters of the Bluegrace Sect; who would dare to try to force their way in or out of a place like this? Her goal was to take control of those eighteen, then leave stealthily.

“Should I let him in?” Fairy Qingfan asked.

“Yes.” Su Youji nodded.

“Understood.” Fairy Qingfan looked at Su Youji and smiled. “You look so dazed and befuddled right now. What sort of a relationship do you have with him, exactly?”

Su Youji shook her head. “What do you mean, ‘dazed and befuddled’? I’m his retainer. He is my master.”

“Master...?” Fairy Qingfan was startled.

.....

At the entrance to Fairy Qingfan’s estate.

Ning and Fairy Qingfan were continuing to chat here.

“For you to join the Bluegrace Sect shows that karmic ties continue to bind us. Enter my estate. Stay here for a while and have a good conversation with me. As of late, your big sister’s been bored senseless.” Fairy Qingfan tossed Ning an intentionally playful look. Now that she knew that Ning was Su Youji’s master, she found herself quite impressed. This white-robed youth was definitely an figure of extraordinary power and ability. To have such an extraordinary figure address her as ‘big sister’ was quite diverting.

Ning gave her a look, then chuckled. “Please lead the way, senior apprentice-sister.”

“Mm.” Fairy Qingfan turned and walked towards her estate, with Ning following behind her.

The eighteen World-level cultivators seated outside all watched as this transpired. When the black-robed elder saw Fairy Qingfan actively invite Ning into the estate, a rather ugly look appeared on his face. He barked coldly, “Junior apprentice-sister Qingfan, don’t try to seduce this new

junior apprentice-brother of ours into helping you out.”

“None of your damn business.” Fairy Qingfan didn’t even turn back to look at him. She simply let out a cold snort.

“Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, remember... there are some things which you should do and some things which you should not do.” A chill filled the voice of the black-robed elder.

.....

By now, Su Youji had already emerged from her room and was staring at the pathways in front of her, waiting eagerly.

Finally, Fairy Qingfan emerged from around the bends, and behind her was a white-robed youth who bore a longsword on his back. The youth looked the same as he always had, the same as he had in her memories.

“Master...” Su Youji stared at him, her heart filled with many emotions.

Guilt?

Gratitude?

In the Astral Islands, she had battled until she was at the point of absolute despair and exhaustion. When she saw Ji Ning appear, she had actually wept. And now, they were meeting at the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect. Even for someone like Ji Ning, a fight here would be quite troublesome. And yet... he had still come.

“It is always you helping me out, rather than vice versa. I’m your retainer, but I’ve never been able to do anything for you.” In this instant, Su Youji suddenly realized that she would never be able to forget how Ji Ning had saved her from the Astral Islands. That moment had been indelibly imprinted into her very soul... and now, they were meeting again here at this branch of the Bluegrace Sect.

“Youji.” Ning walked over towards her.

“Master.” Su Youji nodded slightly. “I’ve caused trouble for you.”

“I hear that this branch leader of the Eastsmoke branch is mainly trying to steal your treasures. I also heard something about a statue of Feixian

the Exalted?” Ning asked.

Su Youji looked at Ning with some degree of surprise. “You already know?”

Ning turned to glance at the nearby Fairy Qingfan. “Fairy Qingfan, if Youji wishes to leave, who will try to stop her?”

Fairy Qingfan could instantly sense that this white-robed youth was now speaking in a very different way and had a very different attitude. When they had been at the entrance to her estate, he had modestly addressed her as ‘senior apprentice-sister Qingfan’. Although he still spoke in a very relaxed way, his words and his demeanor revealed his absolute self-confidence and his dominating presence.

“If little sister Youji wishes to leave, she would first need to deal with those eighteen World-level cultivators standing guard,” Fairy Qingfan said. “They are keeping a tight watch, and if anything happens they will immediately make a report to that fool of a branch leader. When that happens, that fool will undoubtedly order many of our other World-level cultivators to attack. In fact, he might even activate the many formations protecting this place. Once that happens, there really will be nowhere to run.”

Ning nodded slowly. This was what he had expected.

“Master, give me another hundred thousand years and I might be able to work something out,” Su youji said. A hundred thousand years would actually be millions of years if she used a temporal acceleration treasure. That should be more than enough.

“If too much time passes, new variables will enter the equation,” Ning said. “Since this man was able to become the local branch leader, he probably has certain connections within the main base. If he wants to barge into the estate of a fellow disciple and seize an unaffiliated World-level cultivator, all he has to do is find a suitable excuse and he’ll probably be able to convince Daolord Bluegrace into agreeing. You’ve only been here a few centuries, which is why he has been able to bide his time. If you wait too long, that will no longer be the case.”

Su Youji's face turned pale. Right. Once the local branch leader received permission from the main base, he would be able to enter this estate and seize her. By then, she would have no recourse at all.

"Leave it to me. I'll bring you out of here," Ning said.

Su Youji felt a warm feeling in her heart. Although she was worried about Ning, as his retainer she held enormous faith in him. He was indeed an absolute freak of nature!

"Fellow Daoist Ji Ning." The nearby Fairy Qingfan said in a rather unhappy manner, "You must not act rashly. If you remain inside, they'll be limited by the rules of the sect and won't dare to cause trouble. But if you were to take little sister Youji out of this place... they'll be allowed to attack. They won't show mercy to an outsider who isn't a member of our sect."

"Fairy Qingfan, all you need to do is stand back and watch." Ning turned his head and said to Su Youji, "I'll take you into my estate-world."

"Alright." Su Youji nodded.

Fairy Qingfan said unhappily, "Little sister Youji, this isn't..."

Ning just waved his hand, drawing Su Youji into his estate-treasure. He then turned and began to walk towards the outside.

"You-!" Fairy Qingfan immediately hurried after him.

The entrance to the estate.

Ning emerged from the estate and saw the eighteen World-level cultivators seated outside of it.

"Leaving already?" The black-robed elder stared at Ning in a very solemn manner, as did all of the other cultivators.

"Did Fairy Qingfan ask you to help her out by taking the Flamefairy out with you?" The black-robed elder's voice turned icy cold.

"She did not," Ning said.

"Junior apprentice-brother, the Flamefairy's matter has grave

implications for everyone here. As a result, we can't just let you leave like this." A nearby red-haired child spoke in a hoarse voice.

"Do you plan on inspecting my treasures?" Ning frowned.

"Cultivators often hide many of their secrets in their treasures. We won't insist on inspecting everything by force. However... you will need to swear a lifeblood oath that you are not taking the Flamefairy out of this place." The black-robed elder said calmly, "If you truly are not carrying her with you, then this oath will have no impact on you at all. But if you are... then this lifeblood oath will immediately rebound upon you and devour your life. You'll die on the spot."

"Swear the lifeblood oath and we will let you leave." Swish! A dark-red crystalline rod was sent flying towards Ning.

Ning glanced at the dark-red rod, then shook his head.

Suddenly, he manifested three heads and six arms. His six arms dramatically increased in size, and his palms became so large as to block out the skies as he struck out towards the eighteen cultivators nearby.

"What?!"

"Careful!"

Fairy Qingfan was standing right behind him, and her eyes immediately bulged out. He actually went straight to fighting? How could Su Youji's master be such a fool? He actually dared to launch an attack within the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect?!

"Hmph."

"What a fool."

The eighteen World-level cultivators instantly activated their formation, allowing Immortal energy to pool together and then flow over their bodies. The reason there were eighteen of them here was so that they could join forces and fight against tough foes. Even if Su Youji tried to use her bugbeasts and golems to force her way out of the estate, they would be able to hold on against her for a period of time.



BOOM!

As the six enormous palms swept towards them, an enormous collision could be heard as one of the World-level cultivators was captured as easily as one might pick up a little chick. The man was forcibly dragged into Ning's estate-treasure, the entire formation having been forcibly torn apart.

Whoooooosh. The six enormous palms continued to howl forth and strike out towards them.

"Flee!"

"How can he be this powerful?!"

"Run away!"

The remaining World-level cultivators were all stupefied. This initial clash had just resulted in Ning capturing eleven of them, and the rest hurriedly began to scatter and flee.

However, the enormous power ripples caused by this clash spread out to encompass the entire Eastsmoke branch, which was merely ten million kilometers in size. Every single World-level cultivator here was able to easily sense that something had happened, and many streams of godsense swept outwards towards this region.

"Who dare you! How dare you barge into our Bluegrace Sect!" One stream of godsense carried a voice that exploded loudly within Ning's mind.

"Hmph!" Ning suddenly poured out his own godsense, sweeping it in all four directions in an all-encompassing wave. Thanks to the nurturing effect of his azureflower mist energy, Ning's soul was comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step, as was his godsense. Other World-level cultivators truly had far weaker godsenses by comparison.

As Ning's godsense flooded out, it boomed as it slammed into the streams of godsense that had flooded this area. Ning's godsense crushed everything in its path, smashing apart nearly three hundred different streams of godsense and chaosense. The difference between a World-level

cultivator and a Daolord was simply too apparent.

Rumble...

For a moment, the only stream of godsense present within the ten million kilometer region of the Eastsmoke Sect belonged to Ji Ning. All the others had been completely crushed and wiped out!

“The Flamefairy is my retainer. Today, I’ve come to the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect to take my retainer away from this place.” Ning’s voice boomed out, echoing in every corner of the entire Eastsmoke branch. “I trust that most of you know about the matter of your branch leader seeking to steal my retainer’s treasures, and you all know in your hearts who is in the right and who is in the wrong. I am going to take my retainer out of this place, and I’d rather not launch a massacre... but if anyone who seeks to bar my path shall die!”

His voice blasted out across every inch of the local branch’s territory. Every single World-level cultivator found his godsense or chaosense completely suppressed, and they were all completely unable to push back.

Fairy Qingfan stood there at the entrance to her home, staring in amazement as this all happened. When she heard this earth-shattering voice boom out in her mind, she couldn’t help but be shocked once again!

# Chapter 54: Launching A Massacre

Fairy Qingfan was completely stunned by the dominating power of Ji Ning's godsense. The power of one's godsense was derived from the strength of one's soul. This was something that simply couldn't be faked! All by himself, Ji Ning had crushed the godsenses of all the other World-level cultivators in the Eastsmoke branch. This alone was proof that he was a person who ordinary cultivators absolutely could not compare to! And, judging from Ning's words... he had only revealed a tiny fraction of his true power.

"Fellow Daoist Ji Ning." Although Fairy Qingfan was so stunned that she immediately spoke and acted in a much more humble manner, she still said to Ning frantically, "This place is the local headquarters of our Bluegrace Sect. It is protected by many mighty formations which Daolord Bluegrace personally set down! No matter how strong are you, you can't possibly withstand our guardian formations! You are acting far too impetuously!"

Ning gave her a glance. "Fairy Qingfan, I already told you that you only need to do is stand back and watch."

"Then I'll do just that." Fairy Qingfan gritted her teeth. "Although that idiot branch leader is a real imbecile, he won't show any mercy in activating those formations."

"If I really can't beat him, I'll just hide in your estate again, Fairy." Ning tossed a smile her way.

"You..." Fairy Qingfan stared, dazed. Good point. Ji Ning was standing right at the entrance to her estate. He really could simply retreat into it whenever he wished.

Ning then turned to stare at the distant main palace of the Eastsmoke branch, his gaze turning cold. The choice of how to proceed was up to the local branch leader. If he was wise enough to let Ning leave, Ning wouldn't pursue this matter any further and simply wipe the slate clean! It was very common for cultivators to fight each other out of greed for each other's

treasures, after all, and Su Youji hadn't actually been harmed. This matter was a matter that could be easily glossed over.

However, if he chose to fight...

The outcome would be completely different. Ning wasn't certain in his ability to overcome the local formations, and so he wouldn't show any mercy at all.

.....

The main hall of the Eastsmoke branch.

"Who is he? Where the hell did he come from?" The Eastsmoke leader was a fairly handsome man, but his eyes were as cold as ice.

"No idea where he's from."

"Given how powerful his godsense is, he's definitely an extraordinary World-level cultivator. In fact, he might be strong enough to enter the Twelve Palaces or might have already done so." There were three other World-level cultivators in the main hall. Usually the various World-level cultivators of the Eastsmoke branch would reside within their own residences, and so the main palace only had three on duty.

The Eastsmoke leader's face sank.

"Branch leader, what should we do?"

"Should we activate the formation and let them leave?"

The other three all looked at their branch leader.

The Eastsmoke leader was considering this very question as well. "It seems as though the master of the Flamefairy is quite a powerful figure... but no matter what, he's just one man! So what if he really is a member of the Twelve Palaces? In this place, I can still kill him!"

The almighty Hegemon had long ago ordered all members of the Twelve Palaces to swear lifeblood oaths, preventing them from killing each other. However, these oaths were not binding upon the other cultivators of the Brightshore Kingdom! Although World-level cultivators who had been granted entry into the Twelve Palaces were generally incredibly powerful,

over the course of countless years there had been a few occasions in which ordinary World-level cultivators had managed to somehow kill World-level cultivators of the Twelve Palaces. When this happened, the response was simple: Too bad! It was his own damn fault!

If you were protected from Daolords but ended up being killed by World-level cultivators, you deserved it!

“His retainer had so many treasures. He has to have even more.” The Eastsmoke leader grew more and more greedy as he thought about this. “No matter what, he’s just a World-level cultivator. The sectlord once said that not even the most powerful World-level cultivator would be able to defeat these protective formations.”

“Kill. Kill him!” The Eastsmoke leader made his decision, born of personal greed as well as confidence in the protective formation’s power. Ning’s own display of dominance and power had also angered the Eastsmoke leader, contributing to this decision.

Boom! The Eastsmoke leader sent out a strand of his will, merging it into the protective formation that covered the entire Eastsmoke branch. This was a sealing formation that prevented anyone from entering or leaving the place. This formation was perpetually active, which was why Ning had to pretend that he was interested in joining the Bluegrace Sect and be granted entry. If he hadn’t, there would’ve been no way for him to force his way inside. The sealing formation would’ve stopped him dead in his tracks, and the many other formations would’ve begun to launch spells against him as various World-level cultivators took control over them.

“Not only did you barge into the Bluegrace Sect, you act with such arrogance. It seems as though you truly have a death wish!” The Eastsmoke leader’s mind had become one with the formation, and his voice boomed out through the natural energy controlled by the formation as it echoed throughout the region. “On my orders, all disciples of the sect are to take control over our various formations and kill him!”

Giving this order through godsense would’ve been more subtle, but Ning’s godsense had completely permeated this entire region, giving him

no option but to send the order through his formation.

“Yes.”

“Take control of the formations!”

“Quick!”

Some of the World-level cultivators were hesitating, as they all knew that the Eastsmoke leader was in the wrong for lusting over the treasures of this man’s retainer! In addition, the man’s godsense was so strong that he was clearly an unfathomably powerful figure. Some of the vacillating cultivators began to delay on purpose, wanting to see exactly how powerful this mysterious expert was.

However, some of them did obey the orders right away. As for the ones who were extremely good friends with the Eastsmoke leader, they all began to fly straight towards the various formation-cores. “Once we kill him, we’ll split some of the spoils as well.”

“He dared to enter our base. He truly doesn’t know his own limits!”

So long as they rendered merits in battle, there would be no way that the Eastsmoke leader would be able to refuse giving them a portion of the spoils. World-level fellow disciples were fairly important and respected, after all.

.....

Ning stood there in front of Fairy Qingfan’s estate. When Ning heard the Eastsmoke leader send out a booming order to kill him, he just slowly shook his head.

“Think of something, quick!” Fairy Qingfan said desperately.

“Formations... have to be operated by cultivators,” Ning said coldly.

“Come out!” A crimson-black gourd instantly appeared in the air next to Ning. This was the Elementum Waterflame Gourd, and it immediately unleashed two dragon-like streaks of lightning. One was the Watersmoke Lightning, which surged out like a dark stormclouds that was filled with crashing waves of water. The other was the Firecloud Lightning, which

spread out like an enormous billowing cloud of flames. The two streaks of lightning wrapped around each other, then began to blast out in every direction!

It must be understood that Chaos lightning moved faster than almost all Daolords. As for Dao lightning, it moved with such terrifying speed that even Daolords would be befuddled by it, to say nothing of World-level cultivators.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

The Dao lightning blasted out in every direction. In the blink of an eye, every part of the ten million kilometers of the Eastsmoke branch became filled by the Watersmoke Lightning and the Firecloud Lightning. These two mighty types of Dao lightning were incompatible with each other, due to being water-aligned and fire-aligned, and each time they clashed with each other they would explode with utterly earth-shaking force.

“What?!”

“How is this possible?!”

The cultivators who had been the first to move, hoping to help kill Ning and then get a share of his treasures, watched in utter despair as Dao lightning blanketed the skies above them! The Dao lightning moved with such incredible speed that they were filled with complete hopelessness. It must be remembered that Daolord Allgod himself had used those nine secret arts including the [Novessence Thunder] to strike down Emperor Melobo. In terms of speed alone, Dao lightning was generally so fast that even Eternal Emperors were unable to dodge it.

Boom! The two streaks of Dao lightning slammed downwards.

“NO-!” Some of the World-level cultivators brandished their weapons, seeking to block. Alas, as the divine lightning swept past them they were instantly reduced to dust, their truesouls completely annihilated.

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The two mighty streaks of Dao lightning were so powerful that when they were completely focused on a single opponent, they would be able to

slay even a supreme World God with a single blow. Even transcendent World Gods would suffer heavy injuries, and a few repeated strikes would result in their deaths!

However, since Ning had spread out his two streaks of Dao lightning into an area attack, the power of the attack was somewhat lessened. The elite World Gods were instantly swept through and destroyed! The master-class World Gods would be able to survive for two breaths before also perishing. As for supreme World Gods, they would generally be able to survive. However, this small Eastsmoke branch only had a total of around three hundred World-level cultivators. It only had roughly ten or so who had reached the supreme World God level of power!

Boom! The cultivators who had been the first to respond to their leader's orders and charge forward began to die under the horrifying power of the two types of Dao lightning.

There had only been a single supreme World God who had responded to the Eastsmoke leader's orders right away, and Ning focused an enormous amount of lightning on him, causing him to perish after a few breaths as well.

It had only been ten breaths worth of time, but all of the thirty-nine cultivators who had acknowledged their branch leader's orders had perished! As for those who were hesitating or who were just watching, Ning didn't act against them yet.

"Thank goodness."

"Thank goodness I was cautious."

"Thank goodness I hate that idiot."

The many hesitating World-level cultivators in the branch all raised their heads to stare at the boundless streaks of Dao lightning filling the skies. The black lightning and the blazing lightning were tangled together, constantly crackling and exploding with such power that they all felt chilled to the core.

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Fairy Qingfan stared in a similarly stupefied manner at the endless lightning crackling in the skies. She then turned to stare at the crimson-black gourd hanging in the air next to Ning. The gourd was still emitting more streaks of lightning.

“As I said. Anyone who seeks to bar my path shall die.” Ning’s voice boomed out with the thunder, shaking the heavens and the earth. “If you do not get involved, I will not harm you. I do not harm the innocent.”

“You’ve killed the disciples of our sect. You must die!” The Eastsmoke leader’s furious voice echoed in the skies as well. “The nineteen of you who are already in position, activate the formations right away and kill him!”

The Eastsmoke leader had been driven absolutely furious. Normally, if an enemy attacked they would be able to rely on the protective sealing formation to defend them as the various World-level cultivators took control of the various attacking formations and used them to surround and assault their foe. The more powerful formations required multiple World-level cultivators to use, and there was obviously no point in having all of their cultivators be permanently stationed within the various formations. They needed to train and to go out on adventure! They would usually train in their own residences; all they had to do was hurry out and take part in any battles that did arise.

The problem was that Ji Ning was already inside the formation!

Even so, normal enemies would not have been able to prevent them from entering their various formation-cores. The problem was that Ning had the Elementum Waterflame Gourd, allowing him to wipe out all of them at one ago. Alas, nineteen World-level cultivators were permanently stationed in some of the formation-cores at all times, and so some of the formations were still activatable.

“If the nineteen of you do not get involved, I won’t act against you.” Ning’s voice boomed out once more. “But if you try to stop me... I guarantee that I will kill you all, no matter how much time and effort it takes.”

Instantly, the nineteen World-level cultivators within the formation-cores began to hesitate.

Should they get involved in this? If they didn't get involved, they wouldn't be in any danger. But if they did get involved and were unable to kill this mysterious expert, they would be in for a world of hurt.

"Kill him! Later, I'll give all nineteen of you an equal share of his treasures." The Eastsmoke leader spoke out using his Immortal energy through his formation.

"Kill him."

"We are inside our formation. There's no way he can touch us."

"Kill him and his treasures will be ours."

"If we act, we have to make sure we get rid of him."

Three of the World-level cultivators chose not to get involved and instead just watch, but the other sixteen elected to activate their formations out of greed. Activating all the formations would require sixty cultivators, and they were only sixteen of them in position. Only a small part of the power of the formations had been unleashed, but they still felt quite confident. They trusted in the might of Daolord Bluegrace's formation.

Rumble...

Multiple formations throughout the region began to activate!

Ning raised his head to stare into the skies, his eyes as cold as death.

# Chapter 55: The Formations Activate

The Eastsmoke leader was in charge of the most important formation. This was the one preventing Ji Ning from leaving.

As for the other sixteen, they were able to control roughly eight other formations. Three of them were meant for bewildering opponents while the other five were meant for launching attacks.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! The enormous illusion of a axe slowly began to manifest in the air, drawing upon more and more of the power of Heaven and Earth as it corporealized. The illusion became increasingly solid, and its aura continued to increase.

“The power of this divine axe is so great that even a hundred World Gods would be slain by a single chop.” Fairy Qingfan had already hidden herself inside the estate behind Ning, and she watched all this happen with concern.

Rumble...

Thunder rang out, shaking both the heavens and the earth as streaks of lightning began to appear. These were all streaks of Chaos lightning, but they were so numerous that they still possessed tremendous power.

An axe, lightning bolts, flames, black mist, a divine sword... all five attacking formations had been activated. The three bewildering formations also began to unleash their power as well.

“Hmph. How laughable.” Ning simply stood there. His soul was so strong and his will was so resolute that all of the bewildering illusions were useless against him. It must be understood that not even a Heartforce Cultivator like Bertulu had been successful in using illusions to deceive Ning, to say nothing of these formations. These formations were designed to be used against World-level cultivators. They were completely useless against Ning.

“Break!!!”

Ning raised his head to the skies and let out a furious howl.

The two mighty streaks of Dao lightning immediately blasted out once more, striking towards the enormous axe, the Chaos lightning, the flames, the black mist, and the divine sword.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

One explosion after another could be heard as the Dao lightning began to battle the five offensive formations.

The first to be destroyed was the Chaos lightning. Next was the strange, billowing black mist, which was wiped out by the supremely yang-attribute, forceful, and destructive Dao lightning. As for the giant greataxe and the divine sword, they contained so much condensed power that not even the Dao lightning could shake them! The destruction of the Chaos lightning and the strange black fog had used up a tremendous amount of the Dao lightnings' power. In the end, it was only able to slightly weaken the blazing, Fiendgod-shaped flames.

"Kill!" The blazing Fiendgod flew through the air, roaring furiously as flames erupted in its wake.

"Kill!" The enormous greataxe hanging in the air quickly descended like a scythe, chopping down towards Ning with fury.

"Kill." The divine sword hanging in the air descended tip-first as it stabbed straight towards Ning.

"Die. Die! DIE!" The Eastsmoke branch leader gritted his teeth as he watched from within the main palace. He repeated the word 'die' over and over again, hoping that when the power of these three formations descended they would utterly annihilate this white-robed brat.

"You have to do. You HAVE to die." The sixteen World-level cultivators controlling the formations watched eagerly as well.

It was forbidden for members of the Twelve Palaces to fight amongst themselves, but ordinary World-level cultivators often dreamed of having the chance to slay a member of the Twelve Palaces! The status difference between the two was as great as the difference between the heavens and the earth, after all. However, the difference in power was similarly great,

and those who were capable of completing such a momentous task were few and far between.

They now had a chance to accomplish such a deed... and if they won, they would gain access to this terrifyingly powerful World God's treasures.

"Ji Ning..." Fairy Qingfan raised her head to stare at the blazing Fiendgod, the enormous greataxe, and the divine sword.

"I wonder what will happen?"

The other World-level cultivators who were simply watching on the sidelines stared as the three weapons descended towards that tiny white-robed figure.

"Hmph." Ning suddenly let out an angry snort, instantly expanding in size to become a three-headed, six-armed Fiendgod who was more than thirty thousand meters tall. His six enormous palms were large enough to blot out the skies, and he swept them towards the three attacking formations.

"Kill! Kill!" The blazing Fiendgod continued to bellow furiously.

BOOM! BOOM!

Ning was using the same sword-art with all six of his palms – the Heavenbreaker stance!

This strike focused on using raw strength and power to overwhelm and crush foes in a head-on clash! After his experiences in the Astral Islands, Ning's [Brightmoon] sword-art had become dramatically more powerful as well. They were now comparable to the sixth stance of the [Nameless] sword-art! Ning's Heavenbreaker stance now had a similar aura of overwhelming dominance as the third stance of the [Quintessence Sword-Intent], the Astral stance, but it was even more direct and brutish in its might.

BANG! BANG! Two of the mighty palms slammed into blazing Fiendgod in succession. The blazing Fiendgod bellowed furiously as it attempted to fight back... but as the two palms simultaneously collided with it, its body began to break apart.

BOOM! Two enormous palms slammed direct into the chopping greataxe in a frontal collision. The result was the the greataxe was actually shaken into pieces, causing it to dissipate.

The final two palms smashed straight towards that descending sword.

In the blink of an eye, Ning had transformed into a towering Fiendgod, manifested three heads and six arms, then used his six palms to crush all three attacks. This sight caused all of the World-level cultivators in the Eastsmoke branch to fall silent.

“B-but...”

“How can he be this strong?”

“Thank goodness I didn’t get involved!”

They all stared slack-jawed, especially Fairy Qingfan. She was completely dazed! “Youji mainly relied on her bugbeasts and golems! She herself wasn’t that powerful. When this Ji Ning guy took out one of those legendary Elementum Waterflame Gourds, I thought that he had to be just like Youji, someone who relied on magic treasures. I never imagined that he himself is even more powerful than those treasures! H-he... he must be close to a Daolord in might!”

“That blazing Fiendgod, in terms of raw strength alone, was actually comparable to a Daolord of the First Step. Unfortunately, its insights into the Dao were so poor that it was even weaker than ordinary World-level cultivators in this regard.” Ning couldn’t help but shake his head. “As for that axe and the sword, they were materialized with many profound mysteries and were actually quite strong. Unfortunately, all the power they contained was used up after a single strike.”

The weakness of the blazing Fiendgod was that it possessed a very low level of insight into the Dao. As for the greataxe and the divine sword, they had no staying power. They were only able to stay materialized for a brief period of time at their maximum level of power. Ning, however, was a cultivator and was thus able to fight at maximum power for quite some time.

“All things crumble before the face of my Heavenbreaker stance,” Ning said calmly.

This was the fifth stance of the [Brightmoon] sword-art, the Heavenbreaker stance. This was Ning’s most physically powerful attack, an attack relying on overwhelming might! It was far more ferocious and forceful than the Blood Drop stance or the Shadowless stance. However, the Blood Drop stance had better penetration while the Shadowless stance was more unpredictable. When Ning battled against powerful cultivators, he generally tended to use some of the other stances, but when faced with these fairly weak formations it was actually the Heavenbreaker stance which was the most suitable attack.

“What should I do? What should I do?!” The Eastsmoke leader began to freak out, his eyes turning red with panic. “The formations can’t kill him. What should I do?”

“Branch leader, what should we do?”

“How are supposed to beat him?”

The other sixteen World-level cultivators in charge of those eight formations began to panic as well.

The Eastsmoke leader’s eyes were now bloodshot. Through his formation, he howled furiously, “No need to be afraid! He must have used some sort of incredibly powerful divine ability in order to be able to unleash such tremendous might! The more powerful a divine ability is, the more divine power it uses up. He’s probably using up divine power a thousand times faster than he would in a ‘normal’ battle. There’s no way he’ll be able to sustain this, but our formations will ensure that we can continue to launch attacks without pause.”

“Right.”

“Let’s kill him through attrition.”

“There’s no way he’ll be able to launch too many of those attacks.”

They had already made an enemy out of Ji Ning. If they were to now let him leave... unacceptable! The only choice was to follow this path to its

conclusion.

They were using formations, and so they were able to draw upon the endless amount of natural energy that existed in the world. The formations were also powered by chaos jewels, ensuring that the controllers didn't have to use up too much of their own Immortal energy. They'd be able to keep fighting for an extended period of time.

An illusion of an axe, an illusion of a sword, a black mist, a flaming giant, and lightning bolts once more began to form in midair.

Ning glanced upwards at them, then shook his head.

Attrition?

With each attack, the formations would have to build up power for quite some time before striking out. Ning himself was being reinforced by his azureflower mist energy and actually wasn't using much of his own normal power. In a battle like this, the rate at which he absorbed energy from the outside world was actually faster than the rate at which he used it up.

Swoosh. Ning suddenly stepped forward, transforming into a streak of light that flew straight into the air.

"He's moving."

"He's flying towards the main palace."

Many World-level cultivators were watching this fight nervously. They didn't dare to take part in this battle at all, because even if all of them joined forces they would still be butchered by this white-robed youth! The difference between a World-level cultivator and a Daolord of the First Step was simply enormous. Ji Ning had a much lower level of insight compared to a Daolord of the First Step prior to the almighty Hegemon abducting him, but he was now on equal terms with an actual Daolord of the First Step.

As Ning flew forwards, he suffered yet another waves of attacks, but he was once more able to use his six giant palms to effortlessly crush the attackers.



“He’s coming for me.” When the Eastsmoke branch leader saw the towering white-robed youth fly towards him, an ugly look appeared on his face.

“Break for me!” Ning let out a cold roar as his six giant palms sliced through the air, striking simultaneously at the main palace of the Eastsmoke branch. The Eastsmoke leader was hiding within the main palace, and he was as small as an ant compared to the six mighty palms that were descending.

# Chapter 56: Ji Ning's Slaves

The area around the main palace was surrounded by rings of light. When the six colossal heaven-covering hands came crashing down, only the outermost layer of light was shattered, and they regenerated almost instantly.

“Ahahaha! There's no way you'll be able to break through.” The Eastsmoke leader was overjoyed upon seeing this. He stood there in the main palace, a cold smile on his lips. “This is the main palace. This is the most important part of the Eastsmoke branch, and it possesses the strongest defenses. It is guarded by eight layers of defenses, and you were only able to breach one of them. You aren't even close! Since you can't kill me, you'll be the one to die. I refuse to believe you'll be able to keep this divine ability of yours active indefinitely.”

Ji Ning stared down towards him from his position in the skies. Ning nodded slowly as he mused to himself, “The main palace lives up to its reputation. This is the source of power for the entire restrictive formation”

The grand restrictive formation protecting this place required a formation-core, and the formation-core was under the control of the Eastsmoke branch leader and located in the tightly guarded main palace.

“It seems I'll have to use my full power.” A hint of a smile played at the corner of Ning's lips. He then reached out with one hand towards his back, taking a firm hold over the sword which he had been carrying on his back this entire time.

“He's about to draw his sword.”

“He's been carrying that sword along this entire time. It seems that sword should be pretty powerful.”

“I wonder what will happen?”

The World-level cultivators of the Eastsmoke branch all watched intently, including both Fairy Qingfan and the Eastsmoke leader.

Clink.

The sword left its scabbard!

In the instant that Ning drew his sword, five other swords appeared in his other five hands.

Six hands, six Eternal swords.

“Astral stance!” As soon as Ning drew his swords, his six Eternal blades began to gleam with blinding light. They transformed into six streaks of bloody sword-light that descended towards the main palace like a tempest of blood.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

One layer of light after another was shattered. The main palace was guarded by eight formations, and six of them were broken through.

The shockwaves generated by the powerful collisions spread out in every direction, so strong as to cause even the surrounding mountains to crumble and topple. Countless trees were reduced to dust.

“What...” The Eastsmoke leader was so frightened that his face turned bone-white. He then swallowed, hard. “Thankfully, he didn’t break through. He won’t be able to break through.”

“Is this his true power?” Fairy Qingfan, still standing at the entrance to her estate, stared at the distant Ji Ning and the six mighty swords he was wielding. “No wonder little sister Youji was willing to follow and serve him. How can a World-level cultivator be this powerful.”

“Oh? It actually didn’t break?” Ning frowned, then raised his head to glance at the restrictive formations above him.

Swoosh!

Ning charged high into the skies.

“I knew he wouldn’t be able to hold on forever. He had to be using up an enormous amount of divine power to unleash those attacks.” A hint of delight appeared on the Eastsmoke leader’s face. Through the formation, he sent a mental message to the other sixteen cultivators. “Keep using your formations to attack him. Don’t be fooled by how powerful he looks.

Soon, he won't be able to fight back at all."

"Right. He's relying on his own power whereas we are relying on our formation."

"He won't be able to overpower us."

The World-level cultivators continued to use their formations to attack.

"Impudent!" Ning frowned as he saw the greataxe, the sword, and the blazing Fiendgod charged towards him once more.

Whoosh.

Three streaks of bloody sword-light shot out into the skies, completely shattering the three oncoming attacks. Now that Ning was using his Eternal swords, these formations were nothing to him at all.

"Since I cannot break through the main palace with a full-force strike, I should give this grand restrictive formation a try." Ning flew high into the air, head raised as he stared at the barrier in front of him. Although he knew that this barrier had to be extremely tough, he still wanted to give it a try.

"Go." Six streaks of sword-light shot out like six meteors, simultaneously raining down together upon a thirty-meter region of the grand restrictive formation. Although the formation covered a region of ten million kilometers, Ning focused all of his attacks on one point. This would make piercing through it easier.

Rumble... the entire grand restrictive formation trembled slightly, then dispersed the power of Ning's attack.

"It didn't break?" Ning's face changed slightly. "Again."

Rumble... the six streaks of bloody sword-light sliced out once more as Ning furiously attacked the grand restrictive formation.

The entire Eastsmoke branch turned silent. All the World-level cultivators watched as the white-robed youth used his power to furiously assault the grand restrictive formation. It would be countless years before they would ever be able to forget this sight. A World-level cultivator was

so audacious as to challenge the full power of their barrier... and was able to cause the entire barrier to tremble.

Ning sent ten consecutive attacks out against the formation!

“I really can’t break through.” Ning slowly shook his head. “It seems as though forcing my way out of this formation is impractical.”

If he wasn’t able to break out of this place, his only option was to carry out his original plan.

Ning lowered his head, staring downwards with a cold light flashing in his eyes.

Swoosh. Ning immediately charged downwards. In just two seconds, he arrived before a black palace.

“Break.” Six dazzling streaks of sword-light descended upon the black palace. Although the black palace was protected by three layers of barriers, it still exploded into pieces.

“Spare me!”

“Spare us!”

The three World-level cultivators hiding within the black palace immediately ran out, staring at Ning in terror.

Every single formation-core was protected by barrier spells, but those barriers couldn’t possibly compare to the barriers protecting the main palace! Transcendent World Gods might not be able to breach them, but Daolords of the First Step would be able to breach them through raw power.

“Hmph.” Ning waved his giant hand. Whoosh! The heavens seemed to turn dark as he captured all three of them.

“Next.” Ning began to fly towards another formation-core.

“What?!”

“We can’t stop him.”

“Mystdragon, this is all your fault. You ruined us, you idiot! Qingfan was

absolutely right when she said you were an imbecile and buffoon.”

“We are finished.”

“We are all doomed.”

“He said earlier that anyone who stands in his way will be killed.”

Ning blew through the various formation-cores with ease, capturing all sixteen World-level cultivators.

“All of them are doomed.” The Eastsmoke leader’s face was turning pale from his position inside the main palace as he watched this happen. “I’m the only one left. He won’t be able to enter. He can’t break the main palace’s barrier spells.”

Although he consoled himself by saying this, he was still filled with terror. Although the barrier was able to trap Ning, it wasn’t able to kill. If too much time passed, who knew what additional variables might enter the picture?

“Big brother.” The Eastsmoke leader waved his hand, causing a black message-talisman to appear. He gritted his teeth, then crushed it into tiny pieces.

“Big brother. You have to come save me.” The Eastsmoke leader could now sense how dangerous this foe was. At a time like this, his only option was to ask his big brother to come protect him. His big brother had always doted on him.

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The main headquarters of the Bluegrace Sect.

The main headquarters was a vast place, stretching out to cover more than a hundred million kilometers. There were countless cultivators here, with more than three thousand World-level cultivators and innumerable Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals. There were also four Daolords! The most powerful was of course Daolord Bluegrace himself, and he was an extremely famous and reputable figure within the Brightshore Kingdom.

Bang!

A figure suddenly soared into the skies, leaving a deep gorge that was completely shrouded in black mist. This figure was dressed in black robes, had a cold and grim face, and looked quite similar to World God Mystdragon, the branch leader of the Eastsmoke branch. Only, his aura was colder and darker.

“Mystdragon actually shattered the message-talisman I gave him? What sort of danger has he encountered?” Daolord Batdragon’s face was grim, but his eyes were filled with worry.

Him and Mystdragon were actual brothers.

It was extremely rare for a pair of fraternal brothers to be able to train together and reach such heights in cultivation. Batdragon had long ago lost all his other kinsmen, and his little brother was the only one left. In truth, Mystdragon wasn’t really strong enough to qualify for his current position, but since Daolord Batdragon gave him his full support he was able to become a branch leader.

Mystdragon. His one and only little brother.

“I’ll go right now.” Daolord Batdragon didn’t hesitate at all. He immediately transformed into a streak of light as he flew out of the main headquarters and towards the Eastsmoke branch.

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At the top of a mountain of the Eastsmoke branch.

Ning stood there, a group of thirty-four terrified World-level cultivators before him.

Of the thirty-four, sixteen had been using formations to attack Ning while eighteen were the Eastsmoke leader’s devoted followers. The eighteen were the ones who had been keeping tabs on the Flamefairy. Ning had captured them all.

“The eighteen of you obeyed the Eastsmoke branch leader’s orders and wished to slay my retainer and steal her treasures.

“The sixteen of you wished to slay me!”

Ning swept the thirty-four with his gaze. “Quite frankly, I should kill you all.”

The thirty-four were utterly terrified. When cultivators made the wrong enemy or chose the wrong master, they would often find themselves in mortal danger.

“However, I will give you two options. The first option is death! The second option is to immediately swear a lifeblood oath to be my slave.” Ning tossed out an oathstone. “The oath is right here. If you are willing to swear the oath, you’ll be able to stay alive.”

“Slave?”

The World-level cultivators had ugly looks on their faces. World Gods and Chaos Immortals had exalted statuses; how many of them would willingly become the slave of another?

The problem was, if they refused they would die! Ji Ning was simply too powerful, far more powerful than any World God had a right to be. To submit to him... it wasn’t completely unacceptable.

“This oath...”

“This is way too stringent...”

“B-but...”

When the thirty-four of them saw the oath, they were stunned.

Once they swore this oath, they would become absolute slaves who would have to serve Ning with utter devotion. In fact, they weren’t even permitted to lie to him! This was one of the most stringent oaths possible. The only thing that gave them hope was the clause that said they would regain their freedom after a thousand chaos cycles.

A thousand chaos cycles? This was an incredibly long period of time. How many cultivators would even be able to stay alive for that long?

Ning swept them with a glance. He had actually been planning on killing them all, but he had reconsidered as there was always a need for servants or slaves to take care of some minor matters that he simply didn’t have



time for. In addition, when he was out adventuring there were some dangerous places he could use them to scout for him. If some of them were so lucky as to stay alive for a thousand chaos cycles, for him to release them then would be fine as well.

A thousand chaos cycles? Ning couldn't even imagine what level of power he would have reached by then.

"Impossible."

"One wrong step, and it all comes to nothing." Several World-level cultivators raised their heads and sighed. Their true souls immediately dissipated as they perished on the spot.

"I chose the wrong path. I'll have to bear the consequences."

"Forget it, forget it."

In the end, a total of five of them chose suicide. Ning didn't move to stop them.

The other twenty-nine chose to bow their heads and become Ning's slaves. As they saw it, this incomparably terrifying World God would most likely become a Daolord in the future. They were willing to accept becoming the servants and slaves of a Daolord.

Whoosh. Ning waved his hand, accepting these twenty-nine World-level slaves.

# Chapter 57: Daolord Batdragon

World God Mystdragon, the branch leader of the Eastsmoke branch, continued to hide in the main palace of the Eastsmoke branch. He watched as all of this happened, and he felt no sympathy for them at all. Instead, he was celebrating. “Thank goodness the barriers protecting my main palace are much stronger. Although this white-robed kid is strong, he still can’t do a damn thing to me. Hmph! Soon, my big brother will arrive. By then... hpmh!”

World God Mystdragon felt tremendous confidence in his big brother.

Whoosh. Ning suddenly transformed into a streak of light, flying away from the mountain and once more charging towards the main palace.

“He’s coming back?” The Eastsmoke leader was badly frightened. “Why is he coming back? Does he have some even more powerful tricks up his sleeve?”

The Eastsmoke leader’s heart was filled with alarm. He knew that if he didn’t have these barriers and had to face Ning by himself, he probably wouldn’t be able to withstand even a single blow!

The Bluegrace Sect’s area of influence was quite large, as was its territory. Its nine branches were all located in nine different corners of its territory, and even someone like Daolord Batdragon who flew roughly twice as fast as the speed of light would need to fly for roughly an entire day before arriving.

World God Mystdragon had to hold on for at least a day. By then, his big brother the Daolord would arrive and he would be safe.

“Come out.”

Ning landed in front of the main palace as a crimson-black gourd appeared behind him. This was the Elementum Waterflame Gourd. The gourd immediately belched out the Watersmoke Lightning and the Firecloud Lightning, and the two mighty streaks of Dao lightning immediately began to hammer down upon the barrier spells, shattering

through the two outermost layers.

“I hope this breaks it.” Ning manifested three heads and six arms, once more wielding six Violetjewels as he began to furiously assault the main palace.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The main palace echoed with the sound of explosions.

Even though Ning now had the Dao lightning helping him, he was still only able to breach seven of the barriers. The eighth and final barrier remained unbroken, and it was the strongest barrier of all.

“You can’t break it.” The Eastsmoke leader laughed coldly as he saw this. “And you can forget about escaping.”

Ning, however, continued to rain down furious blows with his Eternal weapons. As for his Dao lightning, it was constantly replenished by the natural energy of Heaven and Earth and thus was also able to attack unabated.

“Let’s see how long he can keep attacking for. He has to be using up an enormous amount of divine power, but I’m using up very little Immortal energy in maintaining these protective barriers.” The Eastsmoke leader smiled coldly.

Two hours later. Ning was still furiously attacking, not having taken any break at all.

“What the hell is going on.” The Eastsmoke leader had an ugly look on his face. “He has to be using an insanely powerful divine ability to launch such powerful attacks. It has to be consuming a thousand times as much divine power as a normal strike would. How can he keep going for so long?”

It must be understood that the barriers themselves used up an incredible amount of energy after having been breached and repaired so many times. Although most of this energy came from chaos jewels and the extracted natural energy of the world, a small part of it did have to come from the controller of the formation. His Immortal energy was instrumental in

keeping the barriers and the formations active.

After two hours, more than half of his Immortal energy had been used up!

“Let’s keep fighting then. I’ll be able to hold.” The Eastsmoke leader gritted his teeth. “I have plenty of chaos jewels. I’ll be able to fight for a long period of time if I use my chaos jewels to replenish my energy.”

He was the fraternal brother of a Daolord and a branch leader. He naturally had quite a few chaos jewels, and the main palace itself also had an emergency cache of chaos jewels to ensure that the formations would remain active.

In truth, Ning really was using up quite a bit of energy. Although the azureflower mist energy was being consumed fairly slowly, it was still being used up far faster than he could replenish it. If he continued launching maximum-power attacks like this, he would probably run dry on energy after six hours. However... the one thing which Ning absolutely did not lack for was treasures and chaos jewels. For the sake of being able to end this sooner, using up a few chaos jewels was more than worth it.

Four hours.

Six hours.

Eight hours.

Ning continued his furious attacks. Every so often, Ning would draw some of the chaos jewels into his Jindan chaos region and absorb the pure, distilled chaos energy from the chaos jewels. As for the Eastsmoke leader, he had naturally started to use chaos jewels well before Ning had.

“Mystdragon, I urge you to just withdraw the formation and let him leave.” Fairy Qingfan had already flown over to the main palace. In truth, she was feeling quite stunned at the fact that Ji Ning was able to maintain such a high intensity over such a long period of time. It must be understood that World Gods used up divine power at an alarming rate when they launched full-power attacks. Even if they tried to use chaos jewels to replenish their energy, it wouldn’t be enough.

There was a limit to how fast chaos jewels could be used to replenish energy. Ning used up energy at a very slow rate, which was why he was able to easily use chaos jewels to keep himself topped off.

For those who truly did rely on powerful divine abilities to fight, they'd usually run out of energy after a short battle. There was simply no way for chaos jewels to keep up with their energy expenditures.

"You traitor." The Eastsmoke leader laughed coldly.

"This was all caused by your attempts at robbery. If you let him go, then this matter will be at an end," Fairy Qingfan urged.

"At an end? Ahaha, he's completely unable to breach the main palace. I'm using up almost no Immortal energy in keeping the barrier spells active. I'll be able to keep going for an extremely long period of time thanks to my chaos jewels. Soon, my big brother will arrive and he'll be in for a world of trouble." How could the Eastsmoke leader be willing to give up at a time like this?

So what if the white-robed kid belonged to the Twelve Palaces? His big brother was a member of the Twelve Palaces as well, and a retainer to Daolord Bluegrace. The Eastsmoke leader didn't feel any fear at all.

And if this kid wasn't a member of the Twelve Palaces, his big brother could simply kill him!

"Big brother?" The furiously attacking Ning cast him a glance. By now, Ning had a belly full of fire. Anyone who had been forced to continuously launch full-force attacks for so long would have a belly full of fire.

"It wouldn't matter even if his big brother is Daolord Bluegrace himself." Ning was truly furious now.

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"Mystdragon." The black-robed Daolord Batdragon was flying through the clouds at high speed. His nervousness had caused a layer of bloody light to appear within his eyes. "You have to hang on, Mystdragon. Hang on until I arrive." He couldn't even imagine what sort of threat had caused his little brother to shatter the message-talisman and beg for rescue.

He needed a full day to fly from the main headquarters to the Eastsmoke branch. All sorts of things could happen within a day.

“I don’t care who it is, if someone kills my little brother... I, Batdragon, swear that I will pay any price, up to and including my very life itself, to take revenge.” The bloody light in Daolord Batdragon’s eyes grew even more ominous. The two of them had grown up together as children, then had together embarked upon the path of cultivation. They had even braved many life-and-death dangers together. The relationship between the two simply couldn’t be describe by the word ‘deep’ alone. Mystdragon had been the most important person in his life for countless eons. For the sake of his little brother, he truly was prepared and willing to give up life itself.

“Hold on. Wait for me.” Daolord Batdragon continued to fly forwards at high speed.

A full day and a full night later, Daolord Batdragon finally reached the Eastsmoke branch. Thus far the life-tablet of his little brother, which he carried with him at all times, was still intact. That meant that his little brother was still alive.

Whoosh. When Daolord Batdragon arrived at the grand restrictive formation, he immediately charged in while shouting loudly, “Let me in!”

“Big brother?” The Eastsmoke leader was instantly overjoyed. As controller of the formation, he was able to immediately create a small opening for the black-robed Daolord Batdragon to enter through.

The atmosphere in the branch instantly turned quite odd and eery.

Ning, Fairy Qingfan, and many other World Gods could all sense that something had just happened to the formation. They saw that black-robed figure fly in, and they could sense from the overwhelming aura radiating from him. This was indeed the aura of a Daolord.

“A Daolord arrived.”

“That’s Daolord Batdragon.”

“Our branch leader’s big brother has arrived. That invader will be in

trouble now.”

The various World-level cultivators were all secretly chatting amongst themselves. As for Ning, he halted his wild attacks and turned to stare at the black-robed figuring making a beeline in his direction. This black-robed figure had quite a cold and sinister face which was very similar to the Eastsmoke leader’s appearance.

“Eh?” When the black-robed Daolord Batdragon saw Ning, he could immediately sense the ripples from a identity medallion of the Twelve Palaces.”

Daolord Batdragon flew into the main palace, and the barriers surrounding the palace all vanished. Clearly, the Eastsmoke leader held complete faith in his big brother.

“Hm.” When Daolord Batdragon saw his little brother, a quck and careful scan showed that he wasn’t injured at all.

“Big brother, this World-level cultivator barged into my Eastsmoke branch.” The Eastsmoke branch leader, World God Mystdragon, pointed at Ning as he howled furiously, “Not only did he kill a group of dozens of my World-level cultivators, he forcibly abducted and enslaved a second group. He wanted to kill me, big brother!”

All of the resentment he had felt was bubbling out now. With his big brother by his side, who did he have to fear?

WHAP!!!!

Daolord Batdragon suddenly struck out with his palm, delivering a vicious blow to the face of the Eastsmoke leader. The Eastsmoke leader’s face immediately twisted and distorted as he was sent flying into the walls of the main palace. BOOM! He collided so hard that the entire palace shook. The palace walls were now covered with blood as the Eastsmoke leader lay on the blood-soaked ground, his body twisted brutally.

The Eastsmoke leader raised his head to stare at his elder brother in disbelief.

“Why haven’t you apologized to this fellow Daoist yet!” Daolord

Batdragon stared at him as he furiously roared out these words.



# Chapter 58: Resolution

“Big brother.” The Eastsmoke leader had a befuddled look on his face as he stared at his elder brother. He was to lower his head and admit that he was in the wrong?

“I told you, apologize to this fellow Daoist immediately!” Rage blazed in Daolord Batdragon’s eyes. His voice was very deep, and he growled out one word at a time.

The Eastsmoke leader felt unhappy with this. So what if this white-robed kid really was a member of the Twelve Palaces? His big brother was a member as well. It was forbidden for members of the Twelve Palaces to kill each other; why should he apologize? But judging from the way in which Daolord Batdragon had just spoken, the Eastsmoke leader could sense that his big brother was truly upset this time. He had long ago grown accustomed to obeying his big brother in all things.

“I was in the wrong.” The Eastsmoke leader bowed his head towards Ning. “Please pardon me, fellow Daoist.”

“I am Batdragon.” Daolord Batdragon looked at Ning and spoke in a very courteous manner. “I knew that this good-for-nothing little brother of mine must have done something to offend you, fellow Daoist. I’m willing to offer you fifty thousand cubes of chaos nectar in compensation. I hope that you can spare my little brother, fellow Daoist.” As he spoke, he produced a circular bracelet.

“This contains ten thousand cubes of chaos nectar and two Eternal weapons. The total value here is fifty thousand cubes. I hope you are willing to accept this, fellow Daoist.” As Daolord Batdragon spoke, the bracelet flew straight towards Ning.

Ning was stunned. An immediate apology, followed by fifty thousand cubes of chaos nectar?

Ning knew that this person was a black-armored Daolord, one who had reached that level only thanks to a Pseudo Samsara Pill. The man wasn’t exactly wealthy. The fifty thousand cubes probably didn’t represent all of

his wealth, but it definitely would sting.

Ning glanced at the bracelet, in no hurry to accept it.

This branch leader had first tried to kill Su Youji, then tried to kill Ning himself. Even though Ning had dominated so many World-level cultivators and nearly breached the main palace, the man had refused to bow his head and insisted on keeping the grand restrictive formation active, preventing Ning from leaving in the hopes that his big brother would arrive. By now, Ning had an extremely deep urge to kill. Was he supposed to just write it all off due to a small token of compensation?

Although Ning wasn't able to do anything to the branch leader now that Daolord Batdragon was here, Ning wasn't willing to accept the bracelet. Accepting it meant accepting that this matter was resolved.

The rage that had built up in Ning's breast after a full day of combat was not going to be quenched so easily.

"Swear a lifeblood oath right now." After delivering the bracelet, Daolord Batdragon turned to glare at the Eastsmoke leader. "Within a thousand years, you must travel to Hydragon Mountain and spend a hundred chaos cycles there as a miner. I can see that you've completely let being the Eastsmoke leader go to your head. You've completely forgotten the proper way to behave. Go mine and get your thoughts straight!"

"Mine for a hundred chaos cycles?" The Eastsmoke leader was instantly furious. "Big brother!" A look of rage and resentment was on his face.

"Didn't you hear what I just said? Swear the lifeblood oath right away!" Daolord Batdragon roared.

The Eastsmoke leader was furious as well. "Big brother, why should we be afraid of this brat? So what if he is a member of the Twelve—"

WHAP!!!!

Daolord Batdragon delivered another heavy slap. This time, the Eastsmoke leader was injured even more heavily than last time. He was smashed into the nearby wall by this palm, completely staining it in his blood. The Eastbranch leader slowly slid down the wall. He stared at his

big brother.

Daolord Batdragon, seeing the look on his face, instantly sent a furious mental message. “Do you think I would ever do anything to hurt you?!”

The Eastsmoke leader slowly began to come to his senses, but he truly didn’t understand. He sent back, “But big brother, why?! He’s just a World-level cultivator. Giving him fifty thousand cubes of chaos nectar is already giving him more face than he deserves. And you are going to send me off to mine for a hundred chaos cycles? Mining in Hydragon Mountain is an extremely arduous, boring life. Although it is fairly safe, it will sometimes be dangerous.”

As the Eastsmoke branch leader, he knew a great deal about the legendary Hydragon Mountain.

Hydragon Mountain wasn’t located in the Brightshore Kingdom. It was one of the dangerous zones that was located elsewhere in the Endless Territories. However, the Brightshore Kingdom had taken complete control over it! Combat was forbidden within Hydragon Mountain, making it an extremely safe place, but Hydragon Mountain itself would occasionally give birth to some dangerous things and places. Even when that happened, the miners would still have to go mine. Thus, there were occasionally a few casualties, albeit extremely rare.

“And with you here, big brother, he’s not able to do a damn thing to me. You also belong to the Twelve Palaces!” The Eastsmoke leader sent mentally.

“You idiot.” Daolord Batdragon explained, “Yes, both of us are members of the Twelve Palaces, but... it isn’t the same.”

Daolord Batdragon looked at his little brother. “Look. I made my breakthrough because I used a Pseudo Samsara Pill. I’m a black-armored Daolord, the lowest-ranked type of Daolord in the Twelve Palaces.” Daolord Batdragon began to mentally explain some of the hidden secrets pertaining to the Twelve Palaces. “The Twelve Palaces have some truly horrifying Daolords who are so strong that many of the other organizations in the Endless Territories are terrified of them. Do you think

they have the same level of status as me, someone who relied on a Pseudo Samsara Pill to become a Daolord of the First Step and who will never make any more advancements?”

“But he’s still not able to do anything to you, big brother.” The Eastsmoke leader was beginning to understand, but he remained a bit stubborn.

“Wrong.” Daolord Batdragon sent mentally, “You don’t get it. Members of the Twelve Palaces are forbidden from fighting amongst each other, but if an enormous grudge somehow results from something, palace members are generally expected to go through meditation first! If the mediation fails, then the result will be a duel to the death!”

“Ah!” The Eastsmoke leader instantly grew excited. He sent mentally, “Then he should be afraid of you, right? How could he be a match for you in a duel to the death?”

“Wrong again. I’m a black-armored Daolord who only reached this level due to a Pseudo Samsara Pill. How can I be qualified to force him into a duel to the death?” Daolord Batdragon sent mentally, “Generally speaking, the Palace Lords or Vice Palace Lords of the Twelve Palaces are the ones responsible for mediation. Do you think I would dare to reject what their ruling is? I have no future prospects and my position is low... but this Darknorth was given direct entry to the Twelve Palaces at the World level. His future prospects are unlimited! Once he makes his breakthrough, he will quickly reach the power level of a Daolord of the Second Step. In fact, he might become even stronger than that.”

Daolord Batdragon shook his head. “People like me generally end up as retainers to more powerful Daolords. All we are... are servants.” Daolord Batdragon sighed. “Little brother, you need to understand that in the Twelve Palaces, people like me are looked down upon due to having used Pseudo Samsara Pills. The only reason the other Daolords are somewhat courteous to me is because I am Daolord Bluegrace’s retainer, and they wish to give him face.”

“Ah?!” The Eastsmoke leader was amazed. He knew none of this,

because his big brother rarely discussed matters pertaining to the Twelve Palaces with him.

“It makes sense. People like us will never make any more breakthroughs, which is why we chose to use Pseudo Samsara Pills. To then advance from the First Step to the Second Step as a Daolord? Absolutely impossible.” Daolord Batdragon sent mentally, “That’s why I wanted to try and resolve matters between you and him. Otherwise... even though he can’t kill you, once he becomes a Daolord he’ll have plenty of ways to deal with you.”

Daolord Batdragon suddenly asked, “Oh, right. What exactly is the problem between the two of you?”

“To be honest, it is because he has a retainer known as the Flamefairy...” The Eastsmoke leader didn’t dare to lie to his big brother. He honestly revealed the entire affair to him.

“You imbecile. He was actually able to use his godsense to crush the godsenses of more than three hundred World-level cultivators? Even the Twelve Palaces are rarely able to recruit World-level cultivators of such power. How could you possibly be so reckless as to offend a freak like him?” Daolord Batdragon was once again enraged by what he was hearing. “But let’s put that aside from now. He furiously attacked the formation and was able to break through seven of the eight barriers protecting the main palace. Given how strong he was, what you should’ve done was just cancel the restrictive formation and let him leave! But you insisted on forcing him to fight with you for a full day and night. Also... did he really attack for a full day and night without resting?”

“Yes. He didn’t rest at all.” The Eastsmoke leader was beginning to feel scared.

“He was able to attack at maximum power for that long?” Daolord Batdragon was growing angrier and angrier. “No wonder he’s emanating such a murderous aura! As soon as I arrived here, I could sense his desire to kill. When I offered him that bracelet, he didn’t accept it. Ugh! Ever since I became a Daolord and let you become the Eastsmoke leader, you became completely full of yourself! If you continue to act so rashly... even

if you survive this time, you'll have a very short life ahead of you!"

"I-I... what should I do?" The Eastsmoke leader looked at his big brother.

"My worry is that this Darknorth is a man who holds grudges," Daolord Batdragon explains. "Swear a lifeblood oath right away that you'll go to Hydragon Mountain. Hydragon Mountain is an important place to the Hegemon, as that's where his mines are. No one will dare to attack you there. A hundred chaos cycles from now, this matter will be ancient history. If he still holds a grudge after a hundred chaos cycles, it'll obviously be a problem with him. I would have an excuse to ask Daolord Bluegrace to intervene and help out."

The Eastsmoke branch leader now completely understood. He now realized that even his big brother was nothing more than a small pawn in the Twelve Palaces. If this Darknorth was the vengeful type, he really would be in trouble in the future.

"Fellow Daoist Darknorth, I was in the wrong and let greed blacken my heart." The Eastsmoke leader looked at Ning. He bowed respectfully, then immediately swore a solemn oath. "I swear on my very life itself that I, Mythdragon, will go to Hydragon Mountain within a thousand years. I will spend a hundred chaos cycles there as a miner in order to expiate my sins towards fellow Daoist Darknorth. If I violate this oath, let my truesoul shatter and let my Dao vanish."

Ning was flabbergasted.

Actually, he wasn't really worried about Daolord Batdragon as Ning himself already had the power of a black-armored Daolord. The two were already on par with each other, but Ning was merely at the World level.

Still... Ning understood that with Daolord Batdragon here, it would be extremely hard for Ning to do anything to the Eastsmoke leader. For the Daolord to offer a gift and an apology was one thing, but the branch leader was now swearing to spend a hundred chaos cycles mining at Hydragon Mountain? A hundred chaos cycles was an extremely long period of time. There were many cultivators who wouldn't even live to be that old. Ning could sense that Daolord Batdragon truly did care about this little brother

of his.

“Then let this matter come to an end.” Ning accepted the bracelet, in effect accepting the proposed resolution. “I won’t stay here any longer. Farewell.”

Ning immediately left the main palace.

Daolord Batdragon let out a sigh of relief as he watched Ning accept the bracelet and Ning. Finally, this matter had been included.

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Outside the main palace. Ning looked at Fairy Qingfan.

“Fairy Qingfan.” Ning looked at her, then waved his hand and sent a message-talisman towards her.

Fairy Qingfan stared blankly at the message talisman.

“This matter has been concluded, and I trust Daolord Batdragon won’t pursue this matter any further. Still... if you encounter any problems in the future, you can shatter this talisman and I’ll immediately hasten to your side,” Ning said. Fairy Qingfan truly had helped the Flamefairy out this time.

“Alright.” Fairy Qingfan nodded as she slipped her fingers over the talisman.

Ning soared into the skies, transforming into a streak of light as he flew off into the distance. The grand restrictive formation had long ago been lifted, and Ning soon disappeared into the clouds in the horizon.

Fairy Qingfan watched as Ning left, her fingers unconsciously tightening over the talisman. She murmured to herself, “Just now, if I told him that I wished to become his retainer, he probably would’ve agreed, right? Perhaps my path of cultivation and my destiny would both completely change...”

The path of cultivation was a path which one would have to choose for one’s self. No one else could make these choices for you, and different choices would result in different results.

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Daolord Batdragon stood at the entrance to the main palace, letting out a second sigh of relief upon seeing Ji Ning disappear. He then turned to stare at his little brother. He immediately said, "Hurry up and make your preparations. I'm going to send you away from this place today. You are going to Hydragon Mountain right now."

"Today?" The Eastsmoke leader hesitated a moment, then nodded. "Alright. I'll go make the preparations." As he spoke, he immediately turned and left to gather his things.

Daolord Batdragon mused to himself, "This Darknorth fellow doesn't look like the evil, backstabbing type. This matter probably has truly come to an end. Still..." Daolord Batdragon glanced in his little brother's direction. "It is all for the best. Hydragon Mountain will help to temper his disposition. Still, it is true that the place can be dangerous sometimes. Mm... I'll go and request to become one of the overseers. I'll take care of him in secret."

There were overseers who were charged with overseeing the mining operations in Hydragon Mountain. This sort of boring job was almost always carried out by black-robed Daolords. The stronger Daolords would all be out adventuring. None of them would be willing to do this job.

"But I have to help him out in secret. I can't let him know." Daolord Batdragon made his decision.

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Now that the matter had been resolved, Ning and Su Youji began to advance in their flying vessel. They spent five months flying before finally reaching the Twelve Palaces.

"So beautiful." Su Youji stared at the surroundings from within the flying vessel.

Ning stared off into the distance as well.

At the edges of the horizon, twelve enormous palaces could be seen hovering there in midair. In their center was a dim black cavern. These



twelve palaces were the actual Twelve Palaces. They looked quite close to each other, but in reality the palaces were all separated by many layers of space. They were actually many trillions of kilometers away from each other, but the almighty Hegemon was so powerful that he was able to make them look as though they were located right next to each other. Together, these Twelve Palaces formed the most supremely powerful formation the Brightshore Kingdom had to offer.

Even Eternal Emperors would not dare to enter the Twelve Palaces without permission.

“To the Sword Palace.” Ning laughed.

Swoosh.

The flying vessel quickly began to move towards the direction of the Palace of the Sword.

# Credits

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